4302

A series of journal entries by retired U.S. Marine Mustang, Lieutenant Colonel Stewart Upton

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This book's title is pronounced, forty-three 'O' (the letter 'O') two…43O2.

What is a 'Mustang Marine'? Any Marine, after having served on active duty in the enlisted ranks of the United States Marine Corps and has risen to the officer ranks, and further served as a commissioned or warrant officer on either active duty or reserve status.[1]

[1] Marine Corps Mustang Association website: https://www.marinecorpsmustang.org

Marine Corps Rank Chart		
Officer Ranks	**Title**	**Abbreviation**
O-10	General	Gen.
O-9	Lieutenant General	Lt. Gen.
O-8	Major General	Maj. Gen.
O-7	Brigadier General	Brig. Gen.
O-6	Colonel *('CAPTAIN' in the Navy)*	Col. (CAPT. in Navy)
O-5	Lieutenant Colonel	Lt. Col.
O-4	Major	Maj.
O-3	Captain	Capt.
O-2	1st Lieutenant	1st Lt.
O-1	2nd Lieutenant	2nd Lt.
Warrant Officer Ranks	**Title**	**Abbreviation**
W05	Chief Warrant Officer 5	CWO5
W04	Chief Warrant Officer4	CWO4
W03	Chief Warrant Officer3	CWO3
W02	Chief Warrant Officer2	CWO2
W01	Chief Warrant Officer 1	CWO1
Enlisted Ranks	**Title**	**Abbreviation**
E9	Sergeant Major	Sgt. Maj.
E8	Master Sergeant or 1st Sergeant	MSgt/1st Sgt.
E7	Gunnery Sergeant	GySgt.
E6	Staff Sergeant	SSgt.
E5	Sergeant	Sgt.
E4	Corporal	Cpl.
E3	Lance Corporal	LCpl.
E2	Private First Class	PFC
E1	Private	Pvt.

Last To Know…First To Go

(Dedication)

In June of 1988, a book titled, "Last To Know First To Go," was published that chronicled the history of Marine Corps Combat Correspondents.

It was written by Retired U.S. Marine 'Mustang' Captain Garry M. Cameron (1913-1993). Cameron served during World War II in the South Pacific and later in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts.

The title of Cameron's book would forever capture the sentiment of U.S. Marine Corps' Public Affairs Officers and Combat Correspondents in regard how Marine leaders would first plan to deploy and execute the mission…then at the last minute prior to deployment; realize they needed to have Public Affairs personnel…not just on the mission, but in the first landings.

In most billets and on many deployments, the Public Affairs Military Occupational Specialty will place Marine Public Affairs Officers and Combat Correspondents into individual jobs in what can seem like being on an island all their own.

Cameron's book, since its publication, has helped mentor decades of Public Affairs professionals; passing on invaluable knowledge and experience that only one peer, one generation, can pass down to the next …it's in his honor that this book is written.

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“If the Army and the Navy

Ever look on Heaven's scenes,

They will find the streets are guarded

By United States Marines.”

– Marines' Hymn excerpt

Full Metal Jacket

(Introduction)

"Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck," is what I was saying to myself as I stood in front of a portion of a desk that appeared to have a new coat of bright red paint applied annually for the past twenty years the same way as Vincent van Gogh would have layered it.

My head had just been shaved violently, leaving me with two permanent scars on the back of my head where a barber would take out a part of my skin along with my hair.

A man, referred to as a Drill Instructor (DI), was standing behind me yelling at me every time I would look to my right where another Drill Instructor was talking to all the recruits and writing on a white board.

"Look straight ahead! Did I tell you to look to your right? No, I did not! Look straight ahead," directed the DI behind me.

"How you wrote the date in the past is no longer; you will now write the date in this format," as the DI at the white board pointed to the date 19930603 (YYYYMMDD).

For the next five minutes or so, my head would snap back and forth between looking straight ahead and trying to follow instructions from the DI at the white board as the DI behind me continued to remind me that nobody told me I could deviate from looking straight ahead.

"What have I gotten myself into?" began as an intermittent question I started asking myself that randomly injected itself in-between the 'oh fucks' that were still being repeated like rapid fire inside my brain.

The intensity, head-games, and stress of Marine Corps enlisted bootcamp had begun.

* * * *

I walked into the U.S. Marine Corps recruiter's office in San Luis Obispo in early 1993 and took a seat in front of a Sergeant.

My attitude, after being courted by the Army, was to ask the Marine Corps what they could do to 'top' what the Army was offering a recent College graduate.

I believe the Sergeant had just asked me what the Army was offering me, and I started to list things off...

Just then, some scrawny looking red headed Marine Corporal rose his head off his arms that he had just been resting his head on while sitting at a desk.

He looked like he might be hungover...

"What the fuck do you want to do with the Army? Man, fuck those guys," the Corporal stated rather emphatically.

The Corporal had a 'Casper the ghost' white complexion with freckles...and he seemed to be very sure of himself.

The Corporal's profanity laced diatribe that followed for the next five minutes, began like a slow blowing wind on my face and ended like a Memorex commercial (you know, the one where a guy is sitting in a chair getting blown away from the sheer power of vibrational sound waves coming from the high-fidelity of Memorex's cassette tape).

He was saying something about going into a bar and having everyone you meet that wasn't in the Marines...tell you they wish or could've been one if they wanted to.

I turned back to the Sergeant, because I was kind of afraid of the Corporal now....and then I looked up over the Sergeant's head to see a plaque with a boot glued to it.

The inscription on the plaque read, "Once a Marine, Always a Marine."

"We can offer you a guaranteed 'Military Occupational Specialty' and the rank of Private First Class upon graduation from bootcamp," the Sergeant told me.

I eventually decided to join the Marines because I not only felt challenged, but I had a sense, from the plaque, that if I could become a U.S. Marine and join this organization, it would be a positive family type of support group for the rest of my life.

While I had a college degree when I enlisted, it wouldn't be until I arrived at the Los Angeles processing center prior to beginning boot camp that I would be asked about becoming a Marine Corps officer.

I had no knowledge of the Marine Corps before arriving on the yellow footprints at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego...and I knew even less about the difference between an officer and enlisted.

They brought me in front of a Lieutenant Colonel that looked like Arnold Schwarzenegger in build...his uniform, while sharp, crisp, and clean, could barely hold his (zero fat) body inside of it.

The Lieutenant Colonel asked me if I was interested in becoming an officer...no 'big deal' to me was my body posture that I communicated to him as an undisciplined kid at the time because I just wanted to 'punch my ticket' for military experience and then get an internship with California's Democratic Senator, Diane Feinstein, and hopefully parlay that into having a future working in politics.

I was told that I could reconsider becoming and officer after I completed enlisted bootcamp and improved my fitness should I want to apply.

* * * *

Months prior to enlisting in the Marine Corps my father, an Air Force veteran during the early 50's, had referred to me as a 'Peace-ite' ...It was not a compliment.

At that time, I was a very peaceful and loving person who felt at-one with everything and everyone while in

meditation...I felt like I communicated with the earth, the trees, and animals.

My political affiliation at that time in my early 20s, and now in my early 50s, conforms to the adage of Sir Winston Churchill, "If you are young, and not liberal, you don't have a heart. If you are old, and not conservative, then you don't have a brain."

* * * *

The three months of bootcamp are broken down into three phases (basically one phase per month).

It was during the second phase that 'broke' me.

I had such a bad attitude to authority that prior to breakfast one morning near the end of the second phase, the DIs had put me through what is called 'Intensive Training' (i.e., IT'ed) three times.

Being "IT'ed" (also referred to as being 'bent') is a workout mostly in the squad bay on cement, but it can also be done on dirty/muddy land conditions. It is directed by a DI, that ranges anywhere from five to 20 minutes of rapid jumping jacks, leg-lifts, and push-ups, etc., with no break. A recruit is covered in sweat upon completion and there is a 'pool of sweat' left under the recruit when completed...that you must clean up.

I would put myself through one of these workouts in the middle of the night to make these IT sessions more bearable during the day...but three sessions before breakfast?

By the beginning of the third phase, I had realized that those recruits that got injured or tried to quit were having to stay longer aboard the recruit depot than those that just finished the training.

It was also around this time that I felt the loss in the ability to think freely due to almost every minute of my day being dictated and controlled by the DIs.

I graduated Marine Corps' bootcamp approximately three months later, on time, a trained killer, and in the best psychical shape of my life.

After graduation from bootcamp you are given 10 days of leave (aka 'vacation) before you must return for a month of basic infantry training (referred to as 'Marine Comat Training; MCT).

When I returned from so-called, 'boot-leave' under the threat of imprisonment (that's if you decide to go AWOL[2]), I arrived at San Diego airport and joined a group of fellow newly minted Marines heading for MCT at the airport's USO. They put a movie in to watch while we waited to be picked up.

The movie was called, "Full Metal Jacket." It was a movie about Marine Corps' Bootcamp and a Marine Public Affairs Combat Correspondent's service in, and during the Vietnam war.

As I watched the movie, I asked myself, "Why in the fuck didn't anyone tell me to watch this movie before I even thought of joining the Marine Corps?"

* * * * *

I would spend the next year and four months as an enlisted Marine, rising to the rank of Corporal (which is when you are first considered a 'Non-Commissioned Officer', aka NCO, in the Marine Corps) before I would report to Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia to begin my second bootcamp, but this time to become a U.S. Marine Corps officer in January of 1995.

[2] Absent With Out Leave, AWOL. If you fail to show up at your appointed place and time via official US Government orders, there will be a warrant issued for your arrest. Upon arrest, you will be returned to the military labeled as a deserter (if over 30 days AWOL) and face the appropriate legal action that will negatively label you for the rest of your life.

For over the next two decades I would rise to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and retire on January 1, 2016.

Throughout my career in the U.S. Marine Corps, there were 'ups' and 'downs' that included celebrating success on the nation media stage as well as embarrassment and getting fired on that same stage.

If I could go back in time, I'm not sure I would change a single thing due to the experiences I gained, not just through success, but failure as well.

At the end of my career in the U.S. Marine Corps as my body was failing me and I had to submit my retirement papers, I will tell you this...as they say in football, I left it 'all on the field'.

“Signs signs

Everywhere there's signs

Fucking up the scenery

Breaking my mind

Do this, don't do that

Can't you read the sign”

Signs – by Tesla

No Way Out

In the fall of 1990, I left for college in the Bay area.

Two of my best friends, Kelly, and Shawn, drove me up to California State University East Bay in Hayward, California from the Central Coast of California.

My Dad owned a Chevron gas station at the time and offered to pay for the gas in Kelly's car if he drove me up there.

So, after I had said goodbye to my mother in our home, my Dad was at the gas station when we filled up the gas tank.

I gave him a hug, said goodbye and was off on my way.

Now fast forward to Memorial Day, 1993 ...the day I was dropped off at the Marine Corps recruiting office in San Luis Obispo to begin my enlistment.

My mother and father both drove me down to the recruiting station in San Luis Obispo, about 30 minutes south of our home.

As I was about to get into the government van with my Recruiter, Sergeant Lozano (spell), I gave my mother a hug and as I went to give my father a hug goodbye, he gave me the stiff-arm with a handshake...apparently, he felt it was time to get a little more manly as I left for what is considered the toughest bootcamp of all the military services.

* * * * *

Just moments prior to having my head shaved I had been enjoying a pleasant conversation with a fellow recruit on a bus that was taking us to the San Diego recruit depot.

The environment of the bus, to me, could be comparative to being at Wimbledon (I've never been to Wimbledon)

having tea and crumpets on the lawn while classical music played...so peaceful.

Then, the bus stopped and a man, now known as a Drill Instructor (DI), boarded the bus, and very rudely interrupted our conversations.

The DI was yelling and others that looked like him (additional DIs), were shouting at us to get off the bus as quickly as possible and place our feet on one of the yellow footprints located not far from where the bus had come to a rolling stop.

"Hold out your hands, make a fist with your thumb placed outside your knuckles...now place it down by your sides...this is the 'Position of Attention', and you will remain in this position until I tell you otherwise," said one of the DIs.

* * * *

Before 'hitting the rack' on my first night of bootcamp, I was drug tested and had to shave my face with a razor blade.

The drug test involved urinating in front of the DIs and fellow recruits.

This was my first experience of what's referred to as 'stage fright' (the inability to urinate in front of others) and I also had to 'go number 2' if you know what I mean.

After asking one of the DIs if I could do the urine test on the toilet, thankfully, he agreed...but that led to my first open door toilet experience that only seemed to add to that day's list of humbling experiences.

Next, we all huddled around DI Staff Sergeant Spears, who instructed the recruits on how to shave with a razor blade.

Spears had the typical build for a Marine DI, about 5'11 with a protruding chest that narrowed to his waste. His face was thin with an iron jaw, his cheeks scared from

probably early (and bad) acne, and when he spoke, it sounded like he had his jaw wired shut.

Believe it or not, I had only shaved with an electric razor up to that point in my life. So, as to be expected, with the short (and rushed) time afforded the recruits to shave, I emerged with no less than six to eight cuts on my neck and face.

Another thing Spears talked to us about was having a sense of humor in bad times...he said it's a characteristic that can get you through them.

*****

Again, the three months of U.S. Marine Corps bootcamp are broken down into three phases (basically one phase per month).

I had planned to escape while on duty overnight during the second phase of Bootcamp while training on the rifle range at Camp Pendleton.[3]

I was going to head down to the beach and make my way up the coastline to where I could find a payphone and have one of my friends come pick me up.

Did I think I could do it? Yes!

I was one of a handful of recruits to receive the Marine Corps Combat Water Survival Qualification (a qualification in which you never need to do a swim 'requalification' again in the Marine Corps...less than five out of

[3] As I said in the Introduction, I had not seen the movie 'Full Metal Jacket' prior to attending Marine Corps bootcamp. There is a scene in the movie where a recruit shoots and kills his DI. On an ammo check leaving the riffle range one day, the recruit in front of me tried to conceal a single ammo round through the 'safety check'. But before he got three steps from the Drill Instructors that had just inspected him and let him pass, I alerted the DIs to the ammo round and where it was located. I'm honestly not sure if the recruit had ill intentions with the use of that single round of ammunition to recreate the scene from the movie, but I will say, it was the first time I observed my DIs looking at each other surprised and at a loss for words.

approximately a thousand recruits passed the day long testing).

I credit this to my time growing up swimming at the local pool, lakes, and three years on the Varsity swim team at Paso Robles High School, CA. I also had experience with maneuvering around the rocks and the coastline from frequenting the beaches, swimming across channels, like at Morro Bay, CA, about 30 minutes from my home. So, I was confident I could make it north and navigate around the rocks and cliffs...and I knew my friends would come pick me up.

However, as I stood in the darkness and stillness of the squad bay on the night I planned to leave my duty post, I would come to the realization that I would eventually be arrested and/or on-the-run for the rest of my life.[4]

I had finally come up against boundaries and an organizational structure beyond my parents' control or connections.[5]

* * * * *

In early 2020, about four years after retirement, I received a text from my daughter Eleanor that her mother (aka my then ex-wife) had placed storage bins I had left in a shed on the side of my old house out in the street...the message was that I had until sundown to pick up my belongings or they would be donated.

"Nice!" I thought to myself...I could feel the love.

---

[4] Years later, while serving as the duty officer at Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia, I would 'log-in' numerous Marines that arrived in handcuffs and leg shackles overnight...having been caught finally after going AWOL (Absent without leave) and considered 'deserters'.

[5] Throughout my career I would be aware of Senators and Congressional Representatives trying to tell the Marine Corps what to do with U.S. Marine personnel they had on their staff...they lost every time.

Upon my arrival and loading of the bins into my vehicle it appeared that the bins had been left out in the elements for months, if not years.

While the bins had mud, spiders, and pools of water on them, the contents inside were mostly spared.

One of those items was a detention slip from Mr. Fairbanks at Paso Robles High School for giving him the bird (aka flipping him off).

This reminded me of my fourth-grade experience of flipping off my teacher, Mr. Bailey *(I seem to remember him asking me to step outside and then promptly being picked up by my shirt about 3 feet off the ground to his questioning about how my father, who was an elected member of the school board …would react upon hearing of my actions)*.

While both teachers didn't deserve my adolescent behavior, I feel that when I flipped off my platoon leader (and fellow recruit mind you) during the first day of our mandatory week of chow hall duty at Marine Corps' Recruit Depot in San Diego; …I felt that he deserved it for trying to boss me around.

The recruit platoon leader didn't feel that way and promptly informed the Drill Instructors.

So, after the Drill Instructors (DIs) gave me some IT (intensive training) back in the squad bay for about 15 or 20 minutes, they decided to punish me further by giving me duty all week in an area of the chow hall referred to as the 'Pot-Shack'.

The 'Pot-Shack' was appropriately named for the area of the chow hall where all the dishes, pots, and pans get cleaned…it was not a very large area.

Little did I know I was being given a vacation from the DIs for a week due to the high level of steam and humidity in the Pot-Shack.

If the DIs hung out too long in the area, it would impact the creases in their perfect uniform...so, myself and about 4 other recruits only saw a Drill Instructor about once during the workday to check on us...and if we were kicking ass on the dishes, we were left alone even more.

That week, me and my fellow rule breaking recruits spoke freely (cussing up a storm), joked, and each lost about 10 pounds when the week was over due to the steam and heat in the 'Pot-Shack'.

* * * * *

As we started the second month of bootcamp training, referred to as Phase 2, we were bused up to Camp Pendleton for rifle qualification.

My mother and I had been writing back and forth daily but for some reason her letters stopped suddenly.

By the beginning of the third and final Phase the next month, my recruit battalion had begun 'Dress Blue' uniform fittings.

During the week of our platoon's 'Dress Blue' fittings, I asked to use the restroom I had used with my fellow Marines the previous day.

A payphone booth was located off to the corner, out of site of the Drill Instructors.

I made a 'collect call' to the only home I'd ever known in San Miguel, CA for the past 24 years of my life only to receive an 'out of service' notice.

So, running out of time before the DI's went looking for me, I made another collect call to a residence where I lived for a time after high school and where my oldest brother would hang out frequently.

I got my brother on the phone...he told me the following, "Mom left Dad, the IRS took the gas station and then sold the house."

* * * * *

I banged on the outside hatch three times and announced myself to the 'Senior Drill Instructor' and requested entry.

Entry was granted and I reported in to explain that I had received information that my Mother had left my Dad and the IRS had taken our family business and home my father had built with his own two hands...both the business and our house had been in our family for over 25 years.

I believe my eyes were watering up as I explained everything to him.

"What do you want me to do kid," he asked.

The truth was there was nothing he could do for me...no fault of his own or the Marine Corps.

So, while the Senior DI walked me through some questions to lead me to that realization, he also confirmed what I had hoped to gain when I decided to join the U.S. Marine Corps...a positive family type of support group.

In an article by former Marine Art Buchwald written for 'LIFE' Magazine in Jan. of 1994 he described, "...a love-hate relationship," *(Reference #1)* with the Marine Corps...and this is when my love-hate relationship began.

So, while 50% of me hated being in the 'confines' of the Marine Corps...the other 50% appreciated the option it offered to me to be part of a 'family' unit.

* * * * *

While I have several degrees and specialized in Public Relations for the Marine Corps for more than two decades...I'm terrible with names.

With that said, I remember the names of every one of my DIs:

I've already told you about Staff Sergeant Spears.

Staff Sergeant Erickson pushed my ass over one of the high log obstacles on the 'oak course' and I looked back and yelled at him...I'd reached the point in bootcamp that I wanted to prove to myself I could conquer this physically challenging course. He later 'bent me' (i.e., put me through an 'Intensive Training', i.e., 'IT' session).

Staff Sergeant Miller...I remember writing home to my mother that I thought he might try to kill me...he didn't let me slip away and hide within the platoon after learning of my family's ordeal and he got me to 'sound off' and engage during the last month of bootcamp to earn the 'Title'.

Staff Sergeant Smith was our Senior Drill Instructor. His appearance and shape are the exact image of how they draw Marine Drill Instructors in cartoons...an upper body shaped like a 'V' down to the somewhat long and thin legs.[6]

Smith once taught our platoon a class in the field on how to make an MRE (Meal Ready to Eat) ...a self-contained, individual field ration for use when organized food facilities are not available during training or at war.

While myself and my fellow recruits had been eating MREs on our own for days...we had no choice but to go along with our Senior DI's 'period of instruction'.

Smith started by telling us to open the main course of the MRE...and from there he slowly and sneakily got us to dump every other item found inside the MRE into the main pouch.

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[6] One-time, Senior Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant Smith ordered me to find the other Drill Instructors for our platoon in a nearby chow hall and deliver a message...and you know, there's nothing like a recruit walking into a "Lion's Den" of nothing but Marine Corps Drill Instructors. I delivered my message, then they started to mess with me, asking me questions I didn't have answers to and 'crossed me up' so-to-speak. While I believe I provided them and fellow Drill Instructors with entertainment as I 'squirmed', they still 'bent me' for it later (i.e., another lovely session of 15 to 20 minutes of intensive training).

I didn't catch on until I dumped all my salt package in...it completely ruined any hope of putting the meal I just prepared into my mouth.

We had somehow upset our Senior DI with our poor 'drilling' and M-16 range shooting.

When we lost to the other platoons on range qualification day, things were cool until waking up the next morning. Upon wakeup, we were moved back and forth from being IT'd outside in the mud and then inside the squad bay.

Additionally, inside the squad bay, on this hot summer day, they closed all the windows and doors (no a/c either), beds and footlockers had been tossed, pillows ripped opened, and feathers were everywhere (some of them, even sticking to our faces and neck that were covered in sweat).

We got the point...if we weren't going to train hard and focus, i.e., not listening, not sounding off, and being lazy...the DIs were not having any part of it.

In the end, we won our drill and fitness competitions...and received the award of honor platoon at graduation.

* * * * *

"The first line...the first sentence...of the Russian manual on 'how to defeat' the United States of America...should a war breakout...is to defeat the United States Marine Corps."

That's how one of the PME (Primary Military Education) classes began inside a small downward shaped auditorium during Marine Corps bootcamp in June of 1993...and while I've never been able to confirm this claim...it definitely got my attention.

Along with classes on military history, there was an assembly held during bootcamp in which the DIs claimed to know the 'real' backgrounds of every recruit in the room.

"There were (bad) things in your past and/or physical injuries you failed to disclose when you enlisted with your recruiter," the DIs told us.

The DIs were very...and I mean very, convincing that they knew everything about everyone's past...that apparently, we were hiding from the Marine Corps.

Recruits were given the opportunity to 'come clean' now or face punishment and discharge for nondisclosure of required information to the government.

If I hadn't been warned by my recruiter about this 'confessional' as it's referred to...I might have been extremely fearful that I had failed to disclose something from my past.

But as every single recruit in my Platoon stood up and went into the other room to report something negative about their past, I found myself becoming the last and only recruit left in the room... 'oh man', I thought to myself, 'I can't be the only honest person in the platoon' ...and I visualized a group of DIs coming into the room and roasting me with comments like, "Oh, you're the only honest recruit, huh?"

So, I got up and joined the line of recruits with their heads down and looking at the floor in some kind of shame...I just repeated my MIP (Minor in Possession of Alcohol) ticket I received after high school and had previously reported...the DI taking confessions looked through my record and found it already reported; then he looked up at me as if in disgust and told me to get out of his sight.

* * * * *

It took me about a week of my 'leave' (aka 'vacation') after bootcamp to realize there was nothing left for me in the small town I grew up in on the Central Coast of California.

During the return to my hometown to see my family business and childhood home being operated and lived in by others...I lost my voice; just stressed out about things I guess. I remember one of my friends' Dad, putting his arm around me as I struggled to speak...just trying to tell me it was eventually going to work out.



My mother attended my boot camp graduation at U.S. Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego in August of 1993.

So, as I referenced in the introduction, after my 'leave' upon graduating bootcamp, I returned to the Marine Corps in Sept. of 1993 to begin Marine Combat Training (MCT) aboard Camp Pendleton, Ca.

* * * * *

As myself and my fellow 'boots' *(Enlisted Marines fresh from Boot Camp)* lined up to report-in for MCT at Camp Pendleton, we were told that our training wouldn't begin for a couple of weeks, and we were either going to work in the chow-hall or pull guard-duty.

I was assigned guard-duty where I would be assigned to not only guard armories with a loaded M-16 but serve as part of a Re-Act (reactionary) Platoon that stands ready 24/7 to respond to any threat, anywhere, aboard Camp Pendleton.

One day, while guarding an armory, an instructor with the rank of Corporal lined up his platoon and proceeded to walk by me without presenting his military ID.

He eventually came to the realization after about a 10-minute stand-off that I was going to shoot him if he proceeded without presenting his I.D...and when he went to go retrieve it, his squad leader informed me that the entire exchange had, and I quote, "given him a hard-on" *(i.e., he was motivated at my actions of enforcing my orders guarding a Marine Corps armory)*.

The next day I would be called-in to report to the Commanding Officer of the unit, a Lieutenant Colonel whose armory I had been guarding.

"Son, there are no communists here," he told me while also pointing out that the Corporal should have had his I.D. with him.

I was confused because I had carried out my orders that I was given but counseled for upholding them...whereas if I had let unauthorized access to the Armory take place, I could have been court martialed and imprisoned.[7]

* * * * *

Eventually, my month of MCT would begin, and at the age of 24, I was the oldest Marine in my Platoon...hence, I was referred to as "Grandpa" by my fellow 18, 19, and 20-year-old 'boots'.

We would train for combat mostly in fire teams (a group of four Marines that has 3 Marines carrying M-16s and one Marine carrying an automatic M249-SAW/Light Machine-gun).

Our focus was on the forested terrain of Kosovo because that is where our military leaders, at the time, expected

[7] My father, who was in the Air Force during the early 1950s once told me the story of a duty officer on an Alabama Air Force base where the enlisted member who was on duty and only armed with a wooden gun beat the shit out of an officer (with that wooden gun) when the officer tried to pass without following the proper rules. All of the enlisted Airmen on the base got a 'kick' out of it.

America's next conflict on the ground to take place (and in about six years it would).

During this month of training, I would lose a weekend of liberty for leaving my rifle unsecured during an overnight 'hump' (hike) when I left it with a fellow 'boot' to watch as I went to the bathroom during a planned break in hiking…but he had walked off and left it unattended.

That was a hard, but good, lesson to learn early in my career.

It would be that weekend in the barracks, in 1993, when I picked up the habit of 'chewing' (using smokeless tobacco).

I wasn't necessarily happy with my environment and treatment as a newly minted U.S. Marine, but I was keeping my mouth shut and doing my job.

One day, for some reason or another, a Marine in my platoon picked me out to fuck with me as we gathered and marched off to breakfast. His mouth started ragging on me from the time we lined up to march to the 'chow hall' and continued as we waited to enter the facility.

Even after I sat down to eat, he sat down at the table directly next the one I was sitting at, facing me, and kept 'talking shit to me'.

So, at that point in my life, I'd been in several fights and determined that the element of surprise was better in a fight then telling your opponent to 'put his hands up' (i.e., giving them a warning).

So, as I acted like I was walking by this harassing Marine…I could tell he was grinning to himself that he had somehow bullied me (i.e., he was enjoying 'dumping' whatever he was angry about on me).

I reached my right hand down and grabbed his neck as I walked past him and lifted him up and over the back of his chair. Then I climbed on top of him and began 'choking him out' before one of my fellow Marines, Private First Class

Spiegel (spell), who I went through bootcamp with, tackled me and pulled me off.

I remember looking up at 3 Marine cooks who had 'enjoyed the show' so-to-speak from behind a nearby wall...and I'm very lucky nobody reported me for the attack.

That Marine would later apologize to me and refer to me as 'crazy' and that he was never going to fuck with me again...and I must say, I kind of liked having people think that I was crazy if it meant they would leave me alone and not think they could bully or take advantage of me.

Upon completion of MCT, my time in the Marine Corps had added up to about four to five months and I would be given military orders to Marine Corps Base Camp Johnson in North Carolina to begin training for my Military Occupational Specialty as a pay clerk.

* * * * *

Growing up on the Central Coast of California from 1969 to 1993, residents would usually receive a news report a week prior that clouds would be forming and warn of the possibility of rain...only for the rain to rarely, if ever, happen.

So, I was quite surprised not long after arriving in North Carolina when I was standing out on a grass field under a crisp clear blue sky and watched as clouds rolled in, dropped intense rain showers, and then moved on....leaving the same beautiful blue skies that were there just 20 minutes ago.

Just like the quick nature of the weather in North Carolina, I would roll in and out of Camp Johnson in three or four months and move on to my first official duty station in January of 1994.

I was excited to no longer be a recruit...no longer in basic infantry training...and no longer in school (for now).

I was ready to start my experience in what was referred to as the 'real' Marine Corps at Naval Air Station Memphis; located in Millington, TN.

“I want to ride my Bi-cycle!

Bi-cycle!

Bi-cycle!

Bicycle Race – by Queen

I'm Just Hanging Out With Larry

Naval Air Station Memphis is located about 20 miles south of Memphis in a town called Millington, TN.[8]

I arrived in February of 1994 to one of the most notorious winter events (Reference #2) in Memphis' history: Ice Storm 94 ...the trees were so weighed down with ice, the branches would eventually give way and snap off.

Where I grew up in California, it never snowed and any ice that accumulated overnight would soon melt before noon at the very latest...so, trying to walk on frozen ice-covered sidewalks was a new experience for me.

After a few days of being stuck inside and with no tv (and at the time, no email, no internet, no iPhone...you get the picture) ...I decided that I didn't like cold weather!

* * * * *

Back in the 1990s, a Marine's service record was all contained and documented on paper and in a folder...for enlisted Marines, their record book was referred to as an 'SRB' (Service Record Book) and for Officers, OQR (Officer Qualification Record).

The administrative sections for commands (i.e., battalions, squadrons, or units) could be 'consolidated' in one office building for an entire base...or be 'de-consolidated' in which every command has its own individual administrative unit.

For the couple of Marine Aviation Training Squadrons operating aboard Naval Air Station Memphis, I was assigned to serve as an 0131 'pay and data entry clerk' primarily for all the Marine 'students' attending school there (for example, there were schools aboard base to

[8] NAS Memphis is currently, at the time of this writing, referred to as Naval Support Activity Mid-South.

become an aviation mechanic, aviation supply specialist, etc.), but also to serve the Marine instructors stationed there.

Our administrative office was basically broken down into 3 main sections...a pay and data entry section, a record (update, document, and maintenance of SRBs and OQRs) section, and an orders section. Each section was led by a Staff Sergeant that reported to a Gunnery Sergeant 'Deputy'...that reported to a Chief Warrant Officer that was in charge of the entire office.

The first name of the Staff Sergeant in charge of the 'pay and data entry' section was 'Larry'. The names of the two other Corporals I would be working with, and who were my mentors...will hereby be affectionately referred to as 'Frik' and 'Frak' to protect their identities (or 'Jeff' and 'Ron' respectively).

These two Corporals were pretty much great friends, and each could be described as being at the top of their game in regard to knowledge of their job and the Marine Corps, but each had different leadership styles.

Frik was a squared away, by the book, pure motivation Marine. He had this rash on the back of his neck that would keep breaking out ever since he was in the Middle East for the first Gulf War of the 1990's ...he thought for sure the rash was due to the medications he was ordered to take while on that combat deployment.

Frak was much more 'laissez faire'; he would make a bet with me that he could walk past an officer in the hallway without addressing him as 'Sir' ...sometimes he would be just like, "hey, what's up?" Unlike Frik, Frak didn't take those pills during the Gulf War and had no skin rashes.

Both these fuckers would slap me in the back of my head from time to time for no reason (hence their nicknames) and Larry would always refer to me as 'boot'...but, hazing aside, we were a tight unit that got shit done and I felt like they were looking out for me and 'had my back'.

Not long after my arrival, Frak invited me to a weekend office gathering at his residence where he instructed me that in the junior enlisted ranks, we didn't bother with addressing each other by rank on the weekends or during 'off time' ...and called each other by first names.

What Frak failed to brief me on with his instructions for relaxed rank protocol outside the office was that it only went about as high as Staff Sergeant regarding not getting counseled (or brought up on charges).

So, when we were at one of my first softball games outside the office and I was walking with Larry after the game; we were saying goodbye to our Gunnery Sergeant.

I didn't hesitate when the 'Gunny' asked what my plans were for the weekend... "I'm just hanging out with Larry," I said feeling good about myself...and that's when the Gunnery Sergeant shot Larry a dirty look and I realized; the relaxed rank protocol wasn't embraced by the senior enlisted ranks in the Marine Corps.

* * * * *

At the end of my Marine Corps' career, I realized that, on average, it took me about six months to nail down my new job.[9]

Around the six-month mark after starting out in my first job as a pay and data entry clerk, I was taken in the back office by Larry, Frik and Frak, where they told me my performance was below average.

I was supposed to enter codes into a computer from a very thick manual that was about six-inches thick...but I had ditched the thick manual and created my own smaller folder that contained all the most common codes I was entering.

[9] I would move and/or deploy a total of approximately 22 times during my 22 ½ year career in the Marine Corps.

The thick manual, referred to as the 'PRIM' (Personnel Reporting Instruction Manual) was not organized in a manner that was intuitive to me...it was more like a manual you had to keep using and working with to basically have it memorized in your head.

So, I ditched my 'cheat-sheet' PRIM folder and devoted myself to learning the PRIM like the back of my hand.

I was also having a problem with not getting my ass out of bed when my alarm clock went off...then oversleeping and arriving late to work.

Frak sat me down to talk about what was going on and gave me one of the best bits of advice I've ever received...he told me to put my alarm clock across the room so I would have to get up out of bed to turn it off; and it worked!

* * * * *

I could feel the Gunnery Sergeant's glare as I stood beside him in front of the row of sinks located in the large restroom area of our office building...I was completing my face mask with Noxzema cleansing cream.

My brother had bad acne during his teen years; to the point that it somewhat scarred the side of his cheeks...so, I was very aware of this possibly happening to me and I took extreme measures to prevent as much acne as possible.

In 1994, while the term 'metrosexual' was just coming into our vocabulary (and society) ...my face cream grooming actions in a Marine Corps locker room were perceived as effeminate and/or the actions of a homosexual.

The other strike against me regarding other Marines in my unit thinking I was a homosexual was that I would, at times, join the political banter about the current Clinton administration...that outed me as a democrat (or a left wing liberal).[10]

[10] I would continue to be a big supporter of President Bill Clinton until the Monica Lewinsky scandal and I would continue to be a registered

As author and reporter Thomas Ricks wrote about in his 1997 book, "Making the Corps", the military was mostly made up of partisan conservatives back then.[11]

As a Lance Corporal, I didn't have much money, no car, and no girlfriend...the 'no girlfriend' might have been the third strike against me that prompted an office co-worker and fellow Marine to set me up to hang out with a gay friend of his during a weekend trip to Chicago.

This gay 'friend' basically pulled down his pants in front of me one night after we all drank a case of Baileys Irish Cream liqueur.

On the ride back from Chicago, I figured out that I was set-up and punched my co-worker in the arm while he was driving and upon return to the office that next week, he passed the information around the office that I wasn't gay.[12]

Democrat until about the end of the first term of the President Obama administration. I'm now a registered Independent and I don't vote 'party lines'...I vote for whoever I believe is the best candidate for the job, regardless of party affiliation.

[11] I would continue to encounter mostly partisan conservative Marines until the end of the second term for the President George W. Bush administration in 2007/2008. The change in politics among Marines was due to the constant, and sometimes back-to-back deployments to the two wars we had been fighting in Afghanistan (eight years) and Iraq (about six years). I felt that the open conservative political environment returned near the end of the Obama administration in 2015/2016 due to the younger generation of Marine enlisted and officers not having experienced what their previous generation had gone through...and they longed for war and deploying to it.

[12] This was during a time in the military where being anything other than 'straight' in your sexual orientation could get you arrested and thrown out of the military. Sometimes I observed just one officer making the accusation against an enlisted Marine...and a few months later, they would be discharged. NCIS (U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service) agents would also break into base housing and seize computers searching for 'gay' porn and/or 'stake out' local hotels where military service members might be having unauthorized homosexual sex...breaking down the door and making arrests.

* * * * *

The co-worker Marine in my office that I just wrote about in the previous passage will hereby be referred to as 'Daylike'.

He arrived a couple of months after I did to the Naval Air Station in Memphis; he had transferred from being stationed at Marine Corps Base Okinawa, Japan...and he was nearing the end of his initial four-year service commitment while I was just beginning.

Daylike was the son of a former U.S. Marine and I sensed that Daylike's service in the Marine Corps was more like a family obligation vice he loved the military life.

He had just been busted down to Lance Corporal (an E3) from Corporal (an E4) while in Okinawa and so he got stuck with me cleaning toilets and mopping floors every Thursday afternoon while leadership hit the golf courses.

As a mixed martial arts fighter, he stood over six feet tall and more than 200 pounds. He chain smoked and liked to do things just to 'piss off' everyone else of a higher rank.

Daylike once showed up to a uniform inspection not only late but wearing another Marines ribbons and shooting badges.

While he may not have cared for inspections, he was a hard worker and possessed a very high IQ.

As an administrative Marine, Daylike worked in the section that maintained a Marines service record book. He basically had to read everyone's service history and make sure their record books were not only up to date but organized.

Daylike would sometimes talk with me about the interesting entries in some of the higher-ranking enlisted Marines...one of which was for a Staff Sergeant that had gotten drunk and stolen a bicycle...and every time that Staff Sergeant walked into our office, Daylike would start

singing a song out loud...it was the song titled '*Bicycle Race*' by the music group Queen.

"I want to ride my Biiii-Cycle, Biiii-Cycle!"

* * * * *

They called it a 'green screen' but really the first computer screens in the military, when blank, appeared charcoal black; when letters appeared, they were bright green...and that's how the computers looked when I first arrived in Tennessee.

Next came a 'light blue screen' and the ability to chat with another computer if you knew their code. You could basically receive a text at the bottom of your computer while you were working that told you, "Hey, dummy; go fuck yourself," and you wouldn't know who sent it to you unless you launched an investigation with the communications department.[13]

Sometimes I would just stop working and look around the office to see who was fucking with me...you could always tell the guy that started grinning.

I would also like to thank God at this time that I entered the military service after the invention of the electric typewriter. I honestly don't know how past generations produced so much perfect content on the original manual typewriters.

Software programming; i.e., computers communicating with printers also had advanced to the point where I would be able to place certain forms in the printer and hit a button on the computer and the printer would populate the form perfectly (about 50% of the time depending on the printers mood and how you placed the paper into the printer).

* * * *

[13] The e-mail we received back then...we referred to it as 'Blue Mail'.

I wasn't happy in my life situation because my plan to serve four years of military service while saving all my money to buy a 'Magnum P.I.' Ferrari (which, in 1993, would have been the entire four years' salary without spending anything) ...was not going according to plan.

I was a college graduate having to live with a roommate (a cool guy by the way), making a salary that went to past bill collectors I had prior to my enlistment...and I was getting slapped on the back of the head at work by Frik and Frak.

Looking back, talking about these times after retirement; my psychologist asked me, "were you depressed?"

No, I wasn't depressed...I think I was just beginning to 'bottle up' my frustrations and the contrast in my life that would last me and fuel me for the next two decades.

* * * * *

Most people entering the U.S. military with a college degree become officers...but as I mentioned before, when I enlisted in the Marine Corps, I didn't know anything about the military rank system.

When I came home and informed my father that I had enlisted in the Marine Corps, he told me that it would be a good goal to become a 'Warrant Officer'.



My father (pictured right) in Greenland, 1951. Caption on the back reads, 'with Murray from Kansas'.

My Dad had served in the Air Force as an enlisted Airman, and aviation mechanic, during the Korean War...serving in Greenland and in the southern U.S....he told me that a Warrant Officer was the most respected rank in the military; located in the middle of the rank system.

So, in the enlisted ranks, the lowest rank is a 'Private' and the highest enlisted rank is Sergeant Major, then the U.S. military services have a Warrant Officer rank from one-to-five, with 'five' being the most senior rank, and then you have the ranks of officers from second lieutenant to four star general.

As I mentioned before in the introduction, when I arrived at the Marine Processing center in Los Angeles just prior to starting bootcamp in San Diego, I was brought before a Marine Lieutenant Colonel that could double for Arnold Schwarzenegger...he asked me if I wanted to (attempt to) become an officer.

After some talk going back and forth between my recruiter and the Lieutenant Colonel regarding my low physical fitness test scores, the Lieutenant Colonel informed me

that after I passed enlisted bootcamp and improved my fitness scores, I could apply to become an officer.

* * * * *

I had been assigned the duty of discharge clerk in addition to all my other duties I had regarding military pay.

I took this responsibility very seriously and started working on weekends to stay on top of this duty and to make sure I got it right because the military discharge certificate, referred to as the 'DD-214', can be worth thousands...if not up to a million of dollars in Veteran's benefits.

I even got to do our office Gunnery Sergeant's discharge certificate...he was very happy to pick it up with a full beard while enjoying his early days of retirement.

At this time, I'd also improved my physical fitness back to my college running days[14]...and since you could still jerk your body up over a pullup bar, I figured out how to swing back and forth for the maximum pullup score.

So, when Warrant Officer Swenson (spell) was walking past me in the office one day after taking a smoke break, he asked me, "Hey Upton, you want to be an officer?"

I stood up and was not prepared to say anything more than an absolute and immediate motivated response, "Uhh, Yes Sir!"

Swenson then went on to tell me that if I wanted it, I would have to put the package together myself and submit it to him and he would sign it.[15]

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[14] While on the Cuesta Community College tennis team in San Luis Obispo, California, some days myself and another teammate would pass up cross country runners during our workouts.

[15] Again, a Mustang Marine is a Marine Officer that served in both the Enlisted and Officer ranks. There are two additional Mustang Marine Officers because I used this same exact method (of having them put the administrative package together) when asked by them to be considered for officer commissioning later in my career.

* * * * *

The fucking officer boards.

The fucking bullshit officer boards.

You see, after you have put your recommendation package together for consideration to become a U.S. Marine Corps officer, you must sit before a panel of three officers and be interviewed.

The panel is directed to offer four types of recommendations per the Marine administrative manual:

1. Recommend with enthusiasm,
2. Recommended with confidence,
3. Recommended with reservation or
4. Not recommended.

The first time I sat for a recommendation panel I told them I wanted to become a Marine Corps officer for the future 'bullet' on my resume and that after achieving this goal I would depart the Marine Corps after four additional years of service to attend law school.

I received a 'recommended with confidence' rating and a seat in Warrant Officer Swenson's office with the Gunny.

Swenson said he wanted me to wait six months and do the board again to receive the highest recommendation...and then the Gunny started in on me.

"Son, if you come over to my house to take my daughter out and have your way with her...are you going to tell me that when you pick her up," the Gunny asked.

"No Sir," I responded.

The Gunny continued, "Then, the next time you go before the board, why would you tell them you are going to take the Marine Corps investment in you after four years and just up and leave for law school?"

Then, the Gunny asked me if I thought that after I became a Marine Corps officer if I could tell him what to do (i.e., give him orders).

I said, "I could definitely order you to pass me the basketball during morning PT (physical training)."

We laughed and then all agreed to wait six months.

* * * * *

I honestly thought I nailed my appearance before the second recommendation board of three second lieutenants (no Mustangs among them) ...but they knew about my law school comments from my previous appearance and when I told them I was now a 'lifer' (i.e., a Marine with the intention to make it a career and serve 20 years) ...they didn't believe me.[16]

So, their recommendation was, 'recommended with reservation'.

Instead of going up in recommendations, I went down...and when Warrant Officer Swenson read the recommendation he was infuriated.

Swenson then marched my package to the Commanding Officer (CO), a Lieutenant Colonel, for the administrative squadron whose job it was to place the next endorsement on my officer package.

Warrant Officer Swenson was known as a very ethical and professional leader of Marines. He would have me send every Marine into his office that showed up with an allotment form from a local car dealership out in town to counsel them on what they just got themselves into and offer legal ways for them to return the vehicle.

[16] The board of Lieutenants wrote in their recommendation that in my previous board I said I wanted to be a lawyer but now was saying I wanted to be a 'lifer'...so basically, they wrote in their recommendation that they didn't believe me.

So, when Swenson left the CO's office, it was only about 30 minutes later when a one-page endorsement, written by the Commanding Officer himself was completed, signed, and on top of my recommendation package… at the bottom of the page it read, 'Recommended with Enthusiasm'.

Then, the last stop for my package before being mailed off was the Commanding Officer for all Marines located aboard base; a full bird U.S. Marine Colonel (06).

The Colonel, because of Swenson's recommendation of me and Swenson's reputation didn't even meet with me or interview me.

The Colonel only wrote one sentence on his recommending endorsement: "Recommended with Enthusiasm."

"Doe, a deer, a female deer

Ray, a drop of golden sun

Me, a name I call myself

Far, a long, long way to run

Sew, a needle pulling thread

La, a note to follow Sew

Tea, a drink with jam and bread

That will bring us back to Do (oh-oh-oh)"

Do-Re-Mi – Sound of Music

You're The One We Want For PAO

I arrived at the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Quantico, VA in January of 1995.

Like Marine Corps Enlisted bootcamp, there are about three days where you wear civilian clothes and take care of the administrative and medical processing.

Then, just like I described earlier with the Drill Instructor getting on the bus at San Diego's Recruit Depot to begin yelling and intensive training, Officer Candidates get the same treatment...only we were 'dropped' in a classroom setup located in a large metal shed.

Getting 'dropped', as it is commonly referred to, is most likely a reference to the free-fall that takes place when a civilian that signed up for military service begins their bootcamp experience which many veterans have equated to being like a prison experience.

But unlike Enlisted bootcamp where we got off the bus with nothing in our hands or on our backs...you arrived at OCS with duffle bags and/or suitcases containing the required gear.

When our OCS Drill Instructors were introduced to us in the classroom, and they began yelling at the 'Candidates' to get their 'shit' and take it over to the barracks (across what seemed to be a couple of football fields of grass) ...those Candidates that overpacked and were slow in running with all their 'gear/luggage' were 'fresh meat' and easy targets for the harassment package by the DIs.[17]

There was no organized formation for this movement to what would be our new home for the next three months, just about a 100 or so kids wearing collared shirts and khaki pants, each fending for themselves, trying to get

[17] I would later learn that this movement to the barracks is referred to as the 'Sea Bag Drag'.

away from the yelling Drill Instructors...it was obvious that some Candidates had made the bad decision of over packing; there were clothes left behind scattered across the grass fields.

* * * * *

My first memories of 'red ink' on white paper began in elementary school as it was used to point out wrong answers to quiz or test questions.

But at Marine Corps Officer Candidate School (OCS) we were told by the Drill Instructors to, "Draw a line under your positive comments and write your negative comments in 'red ink'," regarding instructions on how to complete evaluations forms on our fellow Candidates.[18]

Just before the Drill Instructor told us that, he instructed us to rate each of our fellow 'squad' members from '1' to '11' (leaving yourself out of your own ranking) and provide positive comments about some of the things you like about your fellow Candidate.[19]

When this happened for the first round of Candidate self-evaluations...it was 'no bueno' for Senior Upton.

You see, having been through one Marine Corps bootcamp already and finishing my combat training and my 'specialty' schooling (pay and data entry clerk) until the end of January in 1994...it had only been a year of being treated like a human being; and during that time, I clean latrines and toilets every day for U.S. Marine aviation mechanic students.

Bottom line, at the beginning of Officer Candidate School, I wasn't motivated to scrub the floor with the toothbrush type instrument we were provided to do it with.

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[18] I would later learn that these evaluations were referred to as 'Spear evals'...as in 'throwing a spear' at someone.

[19] A/our OCS platoon was made up of four squads with approximately 12 Candidates in each squad (which is further broken down into three 'fire teams' of four Candidates each).

So, while my first round of evals didn't go well for me, I immediately turned that around and became one of the biggest cleaners and helpers of fellow Candidates you could fucking hope for.

By the end of Officer Candidate School, I had risen safely to the middle third of the 'Spear evals' and watched as my fellow Candidates tore into each other with petty gripes about personality characteristics they didn't like in their fellow Candidates and not so much about their performance or ethics.

* * * * *

The other thing that happed at the beginning of OCS was just like out of scene of 'Full Metal Jacket' ...some fucking way, somehow, I left my locker unlocked.

I was not the only one though...a fellow 'prior enlisted' Candidate (a Staff Sergeant) across from my 'racks' (i.e., bunk bed) was found to have his lock unsecured as well.

We were both the first to be inspected because we were the closest to the Drill Instructor's office.

We were given two hours of night watch a night until further notice...that's two hours less sleep for some serious fucking physical and mental training that was going on.

By the end of a week of doing the day training and the night watch duty, both the Staff Sergeant Officer Candidate and I were telling each other we didn't think we could keep this up for much longer...I was sleeping through my classes when we weren't out in the field.

So, I drew the 'small straw' between me and the Staff Sergeant to approach our Drill Instructor and ask for mercy of some sort from the night watch...and when I did, his facial expression led me to believe he'd forgotten about us; then he approved the ending of our daily night watches.

One of the differences between Marine Corps Officer bootcamp and the Marine Corps Enlisted bootcamp is reflected here...as in Enlisted Bootcamp, if I left my locker

unsecured, I would have been invited up to the front of the squad bay for a 15 minute round of Intensive Training that would leave a pool of sweat behind; at Officer boot camp, you were punished with sleep deprivation and told to write an 'essay' of a certain length explaining why you left your locker unsecured and how you would never make that mistake again.[20]

To be honest, I felt the Enlisted method of correction suited me best ☺.

It was also around this time that we received our first weekend of 'liberty' (i.e., freedom from the base and training).

The Warrant Officer that helped me get into OCS told me not to drink alcohol that first weekend...so what do you think I did?

I think with my body and mind being run down from the past two weeks, the beers I drank probably lowered my immune system and I would eventually end up ordered to bed rest for an entire training day with antibiotics that got me back on track.[21]

* * * * *

Regarding being paid while going through OCS, we were all paid at the 'E-5' (i.e., Sgt.'s pay) ...but regarding 'statuses' or military rank, we were 'Candidates'; which was emphatically drilled into us as being less than a 'Private'

[20] I don't think the Drill Instructors really read any of my essays (I think I had to write just two) because at that point in my education I was not only a terrible writer, but I also lacked creativity...so let me just say, there were a bunch of "very, very, very(s)" in my literary explanations to make the word count requirement.

[21] In Marine Corps enlisted bootcamp, you are on the Recruit Depot for the entire bootcamp of 12 weeks with no weekends off. At Marine Corps Officer training, you get your first weekend of liberty to leave the base after the first two weeks of training...and then every weekend after that you get off as well.

(the lowest military rank) aboard the Quantico Marine base.

One Candidate, a prior enlisted Marine Sergeant, made the mistake while on weekend liberty to stop and counsel a Corporal on base...and when the DIs found out about it, he was gone.

My platoon had a handful of prior enlisted Marines, a handful of soon to be college graduates that had already attended a six-week OCS course when they were Sophomores, and the rest were all new to the Marine Corps.

The Candidates in my Platoon and Company were a mix of college graduates from Yale and Harvard, U.S. Senator's sons, and enlisted staff from the Commandant's office that received 'meritorious' commissioning...just to name a few. [22]

Some of the Candidates got off to good starts and then barely graduated, while others, like our honor graduate, started off looking like there was no fucking way he was going to get his shit together after two weeks...then it's like a 'switch' went on in his head and he never made a mistake again.

I would just say this...for the most part about trying to make it through OCS and graduate was more about mindset and attitude for me; meaning if you didn't think you could do it or you couldn't see yourself being a leader of Marines was the real reason the Candidates that 'dropped' did so.

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[22] One memory I will never forget is the guy from Harvard trying to teach himself how to 'iron' his clothes over the weekend liberty. Back then, we had to use heavy starch on our uniforms, but during the time General James Jones was the Commandant of the Marine Corps some years later (around the year 2000), camouflage uniforms were developed where we didn't need to take them to the dry cleaners or use starch when ironing them...just throw them in the washer and dryer and you were 'good-to-go'. This has probably saved service members millions over the years in dry cleaning and 'starch' costs.

* * * * *

The training schedule would alternate between days in the classroom and days out in the field.

One thing that started to happen to me (and about 90% of other Candidates) beginning around this part of the training is that everyone, every now and then would fail a test or a field event (like land navigation) and would have to make it up (you are given 3 tries and then no more).

There are two major 'evaluations' during Officer Candidate School, Small Unit Leadership Evaluation I & II (otherwise known as SULE, pronounced 'sue-lee').

During SULE I, I was with my 'fire-team' of three fellow Candidates in my squad and we were going through what is referred to as the 'Leadership Reaction Course'...a course that was developed by German psychologists before World War II as a means of selecting officers with the proper aptitudes and temperament. (Reference #3)

There are numerous 'courses' as part of this reaction test...and for each course a different member of the fire-team would be 'in-charge'.

We had solved the first two courses and finished solving the third...but when it came time for our last course and for me to be in charge it was a major hit to my grading because we didn't have a fucking clue.[23]

So, fast forward a week or so and I'm on duty overnight. I walk into the Drill Instructor's working area...I look on the wall and our grades were 'pinned' to the wall.

My first round of 'spear' evals and the very low score on the 'Leadership Course' had put me at the bottom of my class at or around the half-way point of Officer Candidate School.

[23] To this day, I still don't have a fucking clue how to solve that course and I would like to shoot those fucking German psychologists in the head...motherfuckers.

The Drill Instructors have a job for Candidates that appear to not be Marine Corps Officer material to test their 'mantle' so-to-speak...and within days I was informed that I would be the Officer Candidate School Company Gunnery Sergeant for the next two weeks.

The Company Gunnery Sergeant is not a real Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant...but for the purposes of the Candidates internal leadership system while we were going through Officer Candidate School, positions like Company Gunnery Sergeant, 1st Sergeant, Executive Officer and Commanding Officer were created.

The job of the Company Gunnery Sergeant in my opinion (and just like in the real Marine Corps), was the most difficult of all these billets...you were responsible for getting everyone out of the barracks in the morning, marching & maneuvering the 'company' of over a hundred Candidates around in huge columns, hitting the 'chow hall' on time, leaving on time, and getting to each training location on the day's itinerary ON TIME!

At first, I noticed my fellow Candidates straggling out of the barracks in the last seconds before we needed to be in formation, and they were staring at me.

"Oh, I get it I thought to myself ...this is what I was doing to them when they were in their training billets," ...and if you remember me flipping off my fellow recruit in bootcamp; I could relate to a 'Candidate' not wanting to take orders from a fellow 'Candidate' that really didn't have any authority over them.

I took the feedback from my fellow Candidates to heart and worked even harder over the next two weeks to make every event on the schedule on time...and if there were 'stranglers' that needed help getting out the door or to make the formations, I helped them in any way I could or made accommodations for them with the Drill Instructors.

Bottom Line: if my fellow Candidates didn't succeed and we all didn't succeed...I wouldn't succeed.

At the end of my time as the Company Gunnery Sergeant I like to think I earned the trust and leadership of the entire Company, and it was a huge confidence boost for me to finish out the rest of Officer Candidate School.

* * * * *

As I mentioned in a previous chapter, where I grew up on the Central Coast of California, it never snowed the entire 24 years I lived there before joining the Marine Corps.

So, when we 'fell-out' for formation at 2:30 AM to begin a 10- or 20-mile hike as part of SULE II (Small Unit Leadership Evaluation 2) ...I was scared for the first time since I'd been at Officer Candidate School.[24]

The Drill Instructors told us we could only wear our 'blouse' (like a long sleeve dress shirt) over a t-shirt; oh, and in addition to it being very cold on the East Coast during winter, it was 'full-on' snowing.

"I'm going to freeze to death," I thought to myself...and I wasn't the only one.

"No way can I survive blizzard conditions with only a couple of shirts on." ...and I thought about sneaking some warm undergarments under my 'blouse,' but I decided against it.[25]

I still remember looking up to the sky and seeing the randomness of how the snowflakes were falling around me as we began...turns out I warmed up just fine hiking up hills with a very weighted pack on my back and a rifle on my shoulder.

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[24] SULE = 'Small Unit Leadership Evaluation'. SULE I is basic order writing and leading patrols in the forest, but SULE II is the culminating exercise/test for U.S. Marine Corps Officer candidates.

[25] There were some Candidates that did put some 'polypro' undergarments on before the hike and ended up 'overheating' and had to fall out of the formation to 'unfuck' themselves (as the Drill Instructor put it).

Then, for the next approximately two and a half days of SULE II you are without sleep, running a couple of marathons, and having to submerge yourself in a water obstacle referred to as 'The Quigley' ...and in the winter, the Drill Instructors must crack the ice before the Candidates can submerge themselves into the water and under the very low log obstacles that stretches approximately 50-yards in length.[26]

When SULE II was over I don't even think any of the Candidates were thinking about sleep...none of us that participated in SULE II failed, and we were elated and relieved to know that we had basically just become 'Officers of Marines'.

* * * * *

The graduation ceremony for Officer Candidate School was held in a theater and each newly minted Marine Corps 2nd Lieutenant received a coin...I can't remember what the coin looked like because I gave it away to the first junior Marine that saluted me (as is the tradition).

Unfortunately, due to the financial issues I have written about previously, my parents were unable to attend...it just seemed like a quiet victory of accomplishment.

While I remember all the names of my Enlisted bootcamp Drill Instructors...I don't remember the names of my Officer Candidate School Drill Instructors.

Regardless, becoming a Marine Corps Officer was one of the proudest moments in my life.

Up next for a new 2nd Lieutenant in the Marine Corps after Officer Candidate School is The Basic School (TBS), which is the Officer equivalent to the Enlisted Marine Combat Training (MCT...that I spoke about in an earlier chapter

[26] The Quigley is a legendary water obstacle that was created by and is named after Lieutenant Colonel William J. Quigley, a veteran of both the Korean and Vietnam wars, designed in 1967. Additionally, to add to our fear of the 'Quigley', there were rumors of 'water moccasins' roaming around in the water.

attending after bootcamp) ...it's a basic infantry course that all junior officers must complete; but while MCT was only a month, TBS was six months.[27]

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The junior officers that made up my 'Delta' class at TBS were all yelling at the top of their lungs, some pounding with their fists, others pounded books upon their desks, some climbed up on their desks...as a Marine Corps Instructor held a 'blue book' above his head in one hand.

The 'blue book' contained the narratives of every single Medal of Honor recipient...and after we got loud enough, the instructor would lower the book, we would get dead silent, and he would read us one of the incredible stories of heroism to set our mindset for the day.

Those classrooms at The Basic School could get very loud quickly and very quiet quickly. One time, as a roommate of a fellow officer thought he could make a joke to him before the crowd quieted down...it was a Jewish joke...he found out the hard way that the Marine Corps doesn't tolerate ethnicity jokes...the jokester was dropped from our class within minutes.

The system at The Basic School was basically just like that of Officer Candidate School, one week in the classroom, then one week out in the 'field'...for six months.

I had taken land navigation while going through my Enlisted bootcamp and Marine Combat Training...but for Officer Candidate School and The Basic School, the land navigation distances are much longer.

I had gotten a 70% (or 7 out of 10) boxes on my first land navigation test...that was a passing score but when one of

[27] TBS is also known as, "The Big Suck' as well as many more jokes on its acronym.

my roommates offered to go out on the next Saturday for some extra training, I took him up on his offer.[28]

He took me out in the 'field' and we sat down on top of mountains and down in creek beds...then we looked at our maps to find where we were and orient ourselves to the surroundings.

This was probably one of the best things I did to help myself while at The Basic School to graduate as I never missed another 'land navigation' box again...I can't say that for my other two roommates that almost didn't pass The Basic School because of failed 'land navigation' tests repeatedly.

* * * * *

Prior to joining the Marine Corps, I would begin my training runs on a dirt road that was covered in gopher holes or holes from some other animals...these regularly would turn my ankles and I would usually have them worked out and loosened up before the end of the first mile.

I would go running with a black lab and a golden lab that eventually figured out they could rest under a bridge about 100 yards from the turnaround point and then rejoin me on my way home (sneaky fuckers).[29]

Part of the trail I ran was covered in barley that would send its 'spikes' into and through my shoes...each piece of barley that spiked my feet felt like 'acupuncture on the go' and took about 30 minutes after each run to pull them all out of my socks and shoes.

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[28] While most junior officers at The Basic School failed or had problems at some point during the six months of training; this roommate never did...he graduated 2nd overall in the class.

[29] Near the turnaround point of the trail, there was a cement road that led to a nearby military base, U.S. Army Camp Roberts. In the other direction, you could get on the highway by way of driving/running through a bridge underpass, taking a left and getting on the 'onramp' headed North on the 101. I had to run about three-quarters up the highway onramp to make my total run six miles. I knew this because I had driven the course in a Jeep.

The other part of the approximately six mile run I trained on was a part of the trail I referred to as 'Daytime Hell Canyon' in which the trail turned to sand and ran through the bottom of tall, narrowly sloped hills covered in barley...I will admit to a handful of times having to walk or stop under the one Oak Tree located on the trail to catch my breath.

I really never had a problem with heat and training throughout my 22 ½ year career...not even in Iraq when I would regularly observe Marines jumping under anything they could find to get some shade in 125-degree dry heat.

But there was one time while out on the rifle range at Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia, with typical east coast heat but with the addition of high humidity. I felt my mortality if I didn't hydrate and be careful...the humidity added to the overall heat conditions and could literally take me down if I didn't replenish my fluids. I never took Quantico in the summertime for granted again.

Again, while I have really had no problem when dealing with hot weather days...I freakin hated cold weather...and while Quantico, Virginia could be very hot and humid during the day, it could also become very cold overnight.

So, while training in the field at Quantico Marine Corps Base overnight, you can hear the wind before it 'hits' you by way of the very tall Pine trees that cover the landscapes...when it's cold, hearing what's about to 'hit' you fifteen seconds before it does can be a daunting mind fuck.

The longest and coldest night of my life was on a hillside aboard Quantico Marine Corps Base as a day patrol turned into an overnight patrol...we had 'fallen-out' with no cold weather gear and as we waited to ambush a fellow squad overnight, I would burry myself as deep as I could into the ground as I couldn't stop shivering.

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"I don't want that job because it's just dealing with Hollywood (i.e., the movie industry) …I joined the Marine Corps for the 'Marine Corps Experience," I told Captain Baker, my TBS 'Staff Platoon Commander' (aka 'SPC').

I had just attended my first TBS 'mixer'[30] and spoke with a very attractive blond haired Marine Corps Captain that worked out of the Los Angeles Marine Corps office…he talked a good talk about having the Public Affair's billet and working with movie stars.[31]



My TBS roommates on my left and right at one of the 'mixers'.

I told Captain Baker what I said because I had previously submitted a special application, which was required, for the sole/single billet of Public Affairs Officer (PAO), Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 4302, that was

[30] A TBS 'mixer' is where all the class of Junior officers get dressed up on one of our many uniforms and visit with Marine Corps Officers that hold all the various billets in the Marine Corps (each commanding their own 'keg' of beer'). These were very fun events held about three times during the six-months of TBS.

[31] In retrospect, as someone who would later in my career select officers to attend and pitch the Public Affairs billet at TBS…I think this officer could have done a better 'pitch' job and I think I just felt a 'bad vibe' off of this guy and as you will read about later, he became (or was involved at the time) in a scandal at the Los Angeles Public Affairs office that would later garner national press coverage and congressional testimony by the Director of Marine Corps Public Affairs.

being offered to my Delta Company training class of about 250 junior Marine Corps officers.[32]

I very clearly told Captain Baker I was withdrawing my application.

What you might not know is that at the end of TBS in the Marine Corps is where and when you get assigned your MOS unless you are a contracted lawyer. The number of slots for each MOS is divided into thirds and so is the graduating class...this is so that all the top graduates don't congregate into one single MOS.

I was in the middle third of my graduating TBS class and I thought about (like some of the other junior officers were talking about) ...failing a couple of tests to drop down to the top of the 'third' grouping to get the top pick at the MOSs available.

I decided against that strategy as I was lucky just to be graduating TBS in my opinion. There were more tests after the MOS determinations were made by the Staff Platoon Commanders of the about five platoons of junior officers that made up my Delta class...along with the Commanding Officer of all the Staff Platoon Commanders, a Major...these people would determine my fate for the next couple of decades as well as about 249 other Marines in my class.

Everyone is required to submit your top three MOS selections to your Staff Platoon Commander; it could have been five. I know my top three were (1) Disbursing, i.e., finances and pay, (2) Administrator (basically what I was doing when I was enlisted, i.e., personnel files, leave, pay, orders, etc.) and (3) Grunt, living in a fox hole.

My focus was on getting a skill that I could use in the private sector should I leave the Marine Corps...being a

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[32] Again, the MOS acronym means, 'Military Occupational Specialty'...i.e., the billet or job you will be assigned; and 4202 is pronounced "Forty-Three 'O' (like the letter) two." Like 'O'311, the military occupational specialty of a U.S. Marine Enlisted infantry grunt.

Grunt would not satisfy that requirement in my opinion, but I had enjoyed the physical tests related to that MOS and if I couldn't get the other MOSs, maybe they would take me.

The Sound of Music song at the beginning of this chapter is the song I would sing while out on 'hikes/humps' during training at TBS due to boredom. We found ourselves out in the woods on patrol for days on end...and eventually my roommates would join me in song (I also made them watch the movie).

It was the morning after the Staff Platoon Commanders and the Commanding Officer of Delta Company met to decide the MOSs and I can't remember why we were being 'bent'[33] with pushups and since Capt. Baker was not a Nazi leader, I asked jokingly while doing pushups if I got the Disbursing MOS...he looked me immediately in the eye and said, "No Upton, you're the one we want for PAO."

And as he said that to me, I intuitively knew (and now even more so) that the officers of the selection committee didn't want the Marines that applied to be 'Hollywood PAOs' ...they wanted someone that leaned a different way and they found that in me with ironically, in my comments to my Staff Platoon Commander withdrawing my application.

Next, it was off to the Defense Information School (DINFOS) located in Fort Meade, MD for three months where the Marine Corps Public Affairs MOS school was part of personnel from the other military services (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard), some government employees, and International (military) exchange students.

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[33] 'Bent' i.e., punished physically for something the unit failed to do or made the SPC look bad.

DINFOS was no different than TBS regarding learning a broad swath of knowledge in a short period of time (i.e., like trying to take a drink of water from a fire hydrant).

The main difference in what DINFOS was teaching regarding writing press releases was that the style of writing was not governed by your High School or College English teachers ...it was governed by a book titled, 'AP Style Guide'.[34]

The 'AP Style Guide' told you what to capitalize and how to abbreviate states, military ranks, etc.

In addition to covering the topic of 'How to write a press release', DINFOS takes you through conducting a press conference, TV & radio interviews, speech writing, and crisis communication with the media after a major incident.

The senior Marine Corps Instructor at the time in January of 1996 was Public Affairs legend Colonel Keith Oliver whom you had to conduct mock interviews with in his office that he would give you immediate feedback on.[35]

Due to one of the worst snowstorms in Maryland's history, I left DINFOS for the 2nd Marine Division located aboard Camp Lejeune, NC a little fatter but extremely excited to finally be done with more than a year of training...I was

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[34] The most important lesson preached at DINFOS was that of spelling correctly a person's name in your reporting or press release...if you can't get that right, how can anyone expect you to get anything else correct?

[35] Col. Oliver didn't always score for the record his 'schooling' of you...be it in his office, in the classroom, or in the hallways of DINFOS. I believe this was because he was always finding something you could have done better...leaving you feeling as you walked out of his office that you 'fell short' of expectations; but I believe he was just challenging you to make you a better U.S. Marine Corps Public Affairs Officer.

finally able to join and be a part of what is referred to in the Marine Corps as the 'Fleet Marine Force' (FMF).[36]

[36] F.M.F. defined: The force of Marines maintained by the Major General Commandant in a state of readiness for operations with the Fleet is hereby designated as Fleet Marine Force (F.M.F.), and as such shall constitute a part of the organization of the United States Fleet and be included in the Operating Force Plan for each fiscal year.

Pentagon News Service, Read at First Light and Debated All Day, Fades Away…

The New York Times, By Thom Shanker; Nov. 1, 2013


CURRENT NEWS EARLY BIRD

Secret Deals, Awkward Bargain

…"The Early Bird could trace its beginnings to 1948, when postwar news-clipping services became common across the military.

They were consolidated in the 1960s in what became known as the Yellow Bird: the top page was canary yellow, designed to stand out on desks piled with papers.

It became an official effort of the Defense Department's public affairs office in 1989.

In the days of hard-copy publication, junior staff members would be sent to grab editions for their bosses.

The arrival of fax machines provided a global reach, which grew longer with the Internet."… (Reference #4)

Stop Smiling
(keep your ego in check!)

I was told by Major Stephen L. Little to stand by the fax machine one morning in the first days of my arrival at the Consolidated Public Affairs Office at Camp Lejeune Marine Corps base located in Jacksonville, NC...Major Little was the Director of Public Affairs for both the base command and all the operational commands located there.

Within the 'Early Bird' news clippings that arrived at our office that morning via fax machine was an article from the Los Angeles Times reporting on a scandal that had developed in the Marine Corps Los Angeles Public Affairs office...and it involved the Captain I had previously met at the TBS mixer (remember, a TBS 'mixer' is explained in footnote #13 of the previous chapter, 'You're the one we want for PAO' chapter).

It appears the Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the Los Angeles Public Affairs office took a personal interest in the Captain; so much so that the Lieutenant Colonel moved the Captain's desk into his office and pursued his companionship after normal work hours.

This controversy blew up mostly because, at the time, a major public debate was going on regarding homosexuals being able to serve in the military.

But there were other reasons that the story received a large amount of publicity...and they are the same 'reasons' that apply to how and why a news report either leads off the nightly newscast or it gets buried in the back of the newspaper.

These are referred to as 'News Values' ...and the more of these 'values' you have in a story, the closer it gets to being on the front page (and above the fold), of a newspaper.

You can find a list of various news values on the internet by either the Department of Defense Information School (DINFOS), Universities that offer degrees in Communications, or Public Relations firms providing some free training to the visitors of their website.

While the total number of news values varies among professionals, I will use the eight listed on the DINFOS website as examples (Reference #5).

1. Timeliness...did it just happen? Is it breaking news? Or is it the anniversary of the 9-11 attacks?
2. Prominence...is it OJ Simpson or Michael Jackson? The President of the United States or a Marine Corps General? A movie star's daily life?
3. Significance...is the news about a vaccine that could save the world? Who could this information help or who all needs to know about it?
4. Proximity...was there a truck accident that was carrying chemicals backing up the major freeway near where you live? An out-of-control wildfire in your area? An escaped convict from a local prison?
5. Uniqueness...or the oddity of a story. "Dog thinks it's a cat."
6. Magnitude...a news event that has multiple follow-on implications that require its continued coverage on the front page of newspapers and TV news broadcasts for weeks; like a stock market crash, Pearl Harbor/9-11 attacks, or Presidential elections.
7. Human Interest...animal pet videos, amazing sporting event clips, and local community 'feel good' stories to name a few.
8. Conflict...Racial issues and marital (relationship) disputes (especially those that involve one spouse attacking the other), and Police actions that result in public disputes as to what really happened fall into this category.

The saying, "If it bleeds, it leads," is very true in the news business...but it's not the best way to explain how a story finds its way to the front page.

So, while the labeling or characterization of a news value is not cast in stone, they provide the best logical reasoning for why a news story is placed at the top of a news website's homepage or why a story continues to 'lead' the cable news broadcast for weeks.

Getting a 'feel' for how many news values apply to an accident or incident you were just informed of helps you, and your team, prepare for incoming calls from the news media (as well as briefing your leadership on what to expect regarding news coverage).

* * * * *

The use of the word 'Consolidated' in front of the name of a military office, such as the Consolidated Public Affairs Office (CPAO) is a military reference to the office being made up of various commands within the same military service, whereas a 'Joint' Public Affairs Office is made up of service members from the various military services (i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, etc.).

While there are no hard and fast rules with the use of these terms, it's important to note that the CPAO I arrived at in March of 1996 was made up of Public Affairs officers and enlisted Marines from both the operational commands (those forces that are focused on deploying to war) and the base/installation commands (those Marines focused on the operation and maintenance of the military base).

Inside the CPAO, it was broken down into sections:

(1) Media (take and respond to media queries)
(2) Community Relations (tours, responding to correspondence, public appearances, etc.)
(3) Newspaper (Combat Correspondents and publication)

(4) Operations (orders, equipment, and travel) [37]

There were about three Marines in each of the Media and Operations sections, one for the Community Relations section, and everyone else in the Newspaper section.

My first assignment was as the Community Relations Officer, and I loved it...I put together tours for WWII and Vietnam veterans while attending evening events in the community representing the base.



Posing for a picture with a couple of veterans after a tour of U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

After a successful tour as the Community Relations Officer, a Marine Public Affairs Officer would then rotate around the office to work at, and learn, the other sections.

The main thing about a Marine CPAO is the amount of mentoring that takes place from the Public Affairs

[37] This is before the common availability of the internet. Years later, the 'internet' section could be a part of each section's responsibility. For example, the media section to post their own press releases to their section of the website; the newspaper section posting their own stories to their website, or single 'Internet' section that makes all the postings and maintains the 'upkeep' of the website.

veterans in the office...therefore, at the time, Marine Public Affairs Officers were widely known and regarded as the best Public Affairs personnel of the military services.[38]

For example, prior to the end of my time as the Community Relations officer, I got called into Major Little's office after he just got off the phone with the Camp Lejeune base Chief of Staff.

It appears the Chief of Staff had been getting phone calls from retired Marines in community about the photo on the cover of the 1997 Jacksonville, NC phonebook.

In retrospect, after changing into my uniform, I walked past a large mirror just prior to the photoshoot for the phonebook, and that little voice in my head told me to 'look myself and my uniform over' ...but I didn't.

I was supposed to have my National Defense medal on the right side of my chest and my Meritorious Unit Citation ribbon on the left...but apparently, I had placed both the National Defense ribbon and medal on my uniform.

Wearing both the medal and the ribbon at the same time for the same award is a violation of military uniform regulations.

Major Little didn't seem to care that much about it as he counseled me, "Next time, bring somebody with you to look over your appearance and uniform."

The worst part of this experience would be the good natured 'ribbing' I took from my fellow Marine Public Affairs Officers...it continues to this day as some of them tell me they still have a copy of this phone book.

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[38] The reason why I say, 'at the time', is because at the end of my military service in 2015, the hope to keep Marine Public Affairs Offices 'Consolidated' was undercut by Generals that simply just wanted their own PR department. As I will write about in later chapters, new Public Affairs Officers, fresh from the Defense Information School, now go out on their own directly to a major command with no 'follow-on' mentoring in the field.

* * * * *

I was tasked to travel west for a couple of hours to be the lead Officer at a funeral for a U.S. Marine Corps veteran.

When you hand the nearest relative or family member the folded flag, you get down on one knee and you tell them, "On behalf of the President of the United States, the United States Marine Corps and a grateful nation, please accept this flag as a symbol of our appreciation for your loved one's honorable and faithful service."

After you stand up from presenting the flag, you are supposed to give a salute. After you salute with your right arm, you are supposed to bring your right arm down with a very slow, drawn out, bringing down of your right arm...it was during the end of the salute that one of the family members was staring right at me a few rows back, standing, with tears coming down his face.

As I drove home, the bus carrying the Marine rifle platoon for the 21-gun salute was pulled over to the side of the road...I thought they had done a great job, but apparently, the Marine Master Sergeant that oversaw them didn't think so.

They were lined up in the dirt field nearby, two rows deep, of about 8 to 10 junior Marines...they were alternating between jumping jacks and push-ups in their Marine Corps 'dress' uniform (which is the equivalent of a business suit).

* * * * *

Ever since the summer of my seventh grade, my father put me to work every day of the week at the Chevron gas station he owned that was located just off the 101 in San Miguel, CA.

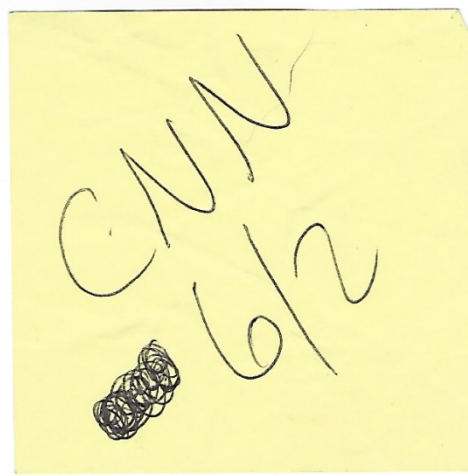
So, when in the Marine Corps, I would regularly just hang out and work late on Fridays as well as coming in on the weekends...these are the times where I found myself answering the phones and being a part of several major events and incidents.

While I was just the 'Community Relations' officer at the time, when an AH-1 Cobra assault helicopter collided with a CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter on a Friday night in a piney swamp during the (at the time) biggest U.S.-British training exercise in history, killing 14 Marines...I was in the office and the media officers were gone for the weekend (Reference #6).

The post-it note on my desk read, 'CNN 6/2'; basically, meaning that CNN was on line #2 ... "holly shit, holly shit," I thought to myself.

This was during a time where CNN was the only major 24/7 cable news network...so everyone was watching: The President, the leaders in the U.K., military leadership, my parents, my childhood friends, etc.

While Maj. Little had come back into the office from his nearby residence on base, he was either doing an interview with the Associated Press (AP) or talking with higher command...he deferred the CNN LIVE telephone interview to me.



While I didn't do great with the LIVE interview, I didn't screw it up either. I hung up the phone and sat back in my chair with a shit-eating grin on my face...that's when Maj. Little walked out of his office.

He told me I did a good job but to remember that Marines died, spouses are now widows, and kids no longer have their Dad...basically to, "Stop smiling and keep your ego in check!"

I followed Major Little around as much as I could during this time...and while you are taught at Public Affairs school to never tell a reporter, "No comment," because it implies you are trying to hide something, when a reporter asked Major Little a question about the condition of the Marines when they were found, he snapped back while looking the reporter directly in the eye, "I'm not going to answer that!"

* * * * *

"What do you mean the boat won't start?"

I asked that question with about 2 to 3 hours until our High School graduation ceremony in 1987 was scheduled to start, and I was stranded in some cove on lake Nacimiento that was an hour from my house once we made land and another 15 minutes to the High School graduation.

We paddled our way out of the cove to get a tow from another boater but by the time I showed up at my house to get my 'cap and gown' my Dad was on my ass ready to beat me up...I think the only thing that salvaged me from his rath was that I still needed to attend the graduation ceremony.

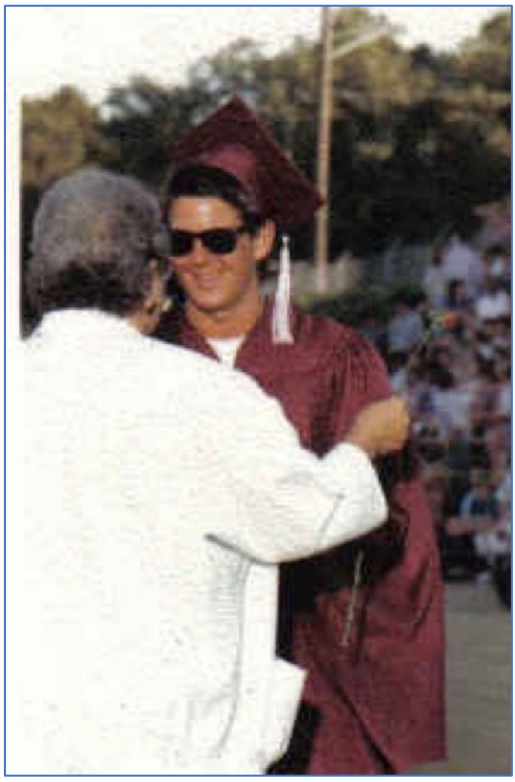
My next stop was for one of my two passengers...this one was one of my best friends, Shawn, and his parents followed him around his house as he got his things and yelled at him the same as mine did.

The next stop was for a friend of ours, first name, Mike, his parents had already left for the graduation ceremony and didn't know he had left his 'cap and gown' in his room.

With about 5 minutes until the graduation ceremony was to start, I had to make two more stops...one was to KFC for some 'White Castle' like chicken snacks and the second was for two roses; one for my girlfriend and first love of my life, Tiffany, and the other was for my mother.

I would like to thank my girlfriend and Mr. Ed Railsback ...Railsback was a great history teacher and former

football player that held up the beginning of the graduation ceremony until we arrived.



While my girlfriend rejected any KFC treats, she accepted the rose...and as I crossed the stage to accept my diploma, I handed my mother, the elected President of the Paso Robles High School Board, the other rose. The exchange on the stage made the local Paso Robles Press newspaper the next day.

So, my mother had some political connections in our county of San Luis Obispo that she used with our local County Supervisor to get me an internship with the San Luis Obispo County government around 1992.

I can't remember what section they put me in, but I mostly was used to inter data into basic (at the time) Microsoft Excel spreadsheets...and I would, at times, because they required me to wear a tie; just make a knot with it before I waked into the office.

One day, I was asked to go to lunch with someone that worked in the downtown San Luis Obispo office, and we just walked to his nearby house where he made some sandwiches...on the walk back I remember telling him that I didn't see what benefit a Political Science (Bachelor of

Science) degree could do for me in the real world as I was having problems finding a job in the current economy. [39]

He told me that a degree in Political Science was more valuable than I was giving it credit for and that knowledge would eventually prove very valuable to me...and so when CNN or other major news outlets were calling into our Public Affairs office and the world's focus was upon us; seasoned Public Affairs Officers didn't rush to the phones to answer queries; but I felt no fear in attempting to answer national and international level queries.

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I was in the office preparing to depart for Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, NC to hold a press conference on the helicopters colliding incident when the phone rang.[40]

On the other end of the line was (at the time) Brigadier General Clifford L. Stanley, the head of Marine Corps Public Affairs asking to speak with Maj. Little...but before doing so, he complimented me on my work handling this incident and later sent me a letter of appreciation (LOA) on behalf of comments he received about me from CNN.

The car ride up to Cherry Point from Camp Lejeune is about an hour if you drive a Chevy Camaro up a backroad as fast as Major Little did...he could have been a race car driver because I'd hung out with NASCAR folks prior to joining the military and he had enough talent that I never felt worried.

We arrived at the Air Station and Major Little went off to privately pre-brief the Commanding General of the II Marine Air Wing while I started introducing myself to

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[39] My brother Russ would refer to this as a degree in 'BS'...aka Bull Shitting other people.

[40] The reason the press conference was held at Cherry Point versus Camp Lejeune was because the Aviation command the helicopters belonged to was based there...The II Marine Aviation Wing (pronounced '2nd MAW).

those hanging around waiting for the press conference begin.

While I was a 2nd Lieutenant in rank, I met a fellow Public Affairs Officer, a 1st Lieutenant that worked out of the Cherry Point Consolidated Public Affairs Office...what I remember about talking with him is a reflection on how the attrition and upward mobility in the Marine Corps officer ranks 'worked' back then.

The 1st Lieutenant had received one mark down on one of his evaluations from 'Outstanding' to 'Excellent' ...a non-perfect evaluation, and at that time in the Marine Corps, it meant your career was over and you needed to start looking for a Civilian job. He was crushed.[41]

The other person I met was a Navy Times reporter by the name of Tobias Naegele...it was a great conversation with him, and I would keep in touch with him throughout the next couple of decades as he rose through the Military Times Publishing Company and then on to Stars & Stripes as their Ombudsman.

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There is a scene at the beginning of the movie, 'The Other Guys' in which Detective Allen Gamble, played by Will Ferrell, offers to do paperwork that nobody else wants to do...and he is then mocked in a high-pitched feminine type of voice by a fellow Detective named 'Martin', played by former Marine Corps Public Affairs Officer Rob Riggle, saying, "I'll do it, I'll do it."

That's kind of the way I felt the day we were briefed that the current President, Bill Clinton, would be visiting and speaking at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in December of 1996 when they asked who wanted to help handle the

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[41] There were about 20 categories on what was referred to then as a 'Fitness Report'...like 'leadership', 'Endurance', 'Judgement', and 'Growth Potential', etc. At the time of my retirement, these evaluations would be dramatically changed and be referred to as 'Performance Evaluations'; part of the Performance Evaluation System (PES).

visit…I raised my hand immediately and said, “I’ll do it, I’ll do it.”

As part of the visit’s itinerary, the President was to stop at a ‘Family Readiness Center’, receive a briefing and exchange an email (this is the early days of the internet and email) with a Marine commander that was forward deployed in the Mediterranean whose Marines used the Family Readiness Center to communicate with their families back at Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base.

I was in charge of providing the contents of the email the President had sent to the traveling press corps. I don’t remember there being any misspellings in the email the President sent, but there were grammar issues and so I chose to read the email to the press vice handing it over to them when they asked.

I didn’t provide the printout of the email to the traveling press corps because I was very aware of how the press treated former Vice President Dan Quale while he was in office in 1992 regarding the spelling of the word, ‘potato’ while overseeing a spelling bee contest at Rivera Elementary School in Trenton, NJ. The gaffe…reverberated through popular culture with gale-force intensity. (Reference #7)

I was thrilled to get to ride in one of the Presidential escort vehicles…riding with White House Chief of Staff and North Carolina businessman & political figure, Erskine Bowles. I remember he made some good jokes to lighten my mood on the ride to where the President was going to give his speech.

I was very tense to make sure nothing went wrong and wouldn’t be able to relax until it was all over…this might have been the start of my ulcers and eating problems; my sleep problems would start in a couple of months in Haiti.

The President gives his speech thanking Marines for their recent service in Bosnia and other world hot spots (Reference #8) …and I’m like the only one that found my

way to the bottom of the stage where the President was walking off to be the first one to shake his hand.

While my Dad wasn't a fan of President Clinton, he thought it was awesome to see me on CNN that day.

I would continue to support President Clinton until one-night years later when I would come home from graduate school to hear his address to the nation in which he apologized for comments he had made regarding an affair he had – had while in office...then, I no longer supported him.

* * * * *

He started pounding his fist on the long table in which he sat at the 'head' of as the rest of the staff of the major sections prepared themselves for what was about to happen next...then he got up and started walking around the table behind the officers, which was comprised of officers with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel. I was sitting off to the side.

Lieutenant General Emil "Buck" Bedard, then the commanding officer of the 2nd Marine Division, he was 'pissed' about the 'readiness' statistics he was seeing across the board...i.e., tanks, trucks, amphibious vehicles, etc.

Bedard picked up the papers that had been in front of him as he came back around to the head of the table and then he threw them into the air and in a downward motion...then he stormed out of the room.

The Chief of Staff, a Colonel, then got up and went to the head of the table and didn't sit...instead he stood with his hands motioning in a downward motion and basically said, "hey, calm down, it's going to be OK, let's figure this out.[42]

Bottom line, readiness in any advanced military is not easy...especially regarding aviation readiness and the long

[42] Does the phrase, "Good Cop, Bad Cop," ring a bell?

hours young Marines work to keep aircraft ready and the pilots safe.

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Enter 'Little Napoleon'...

A new 2nd Lieutenant into the rotation at the Camp Lejeune Consolidated Public Affairs Office was during a time when officers, of the same rank, were ranked against each other by their bosses as being '1 of 3', '2 of 3', or '3 of 3'.

So, when Little Napoleon didn't like being ranked below '1 of 3', she decided to get rid of the author of her low-ranking evaluation, the Deputy Director of our office, by calling the base Provost Marshal Office (i.e., PMO, the base police) after he left the officers club to have him pulled over for a DUI...this was the first of many other careers this ambitious officer ruined during her time in the Marine Corps.

I took the call from my former boss while working out of the media section the morning his photo and court conviction hit the papers of the local Jacksonville Daily News... "How, why, could you do this to me?"

"Sir, I don't know what to tell you; I'm sorry," I said as I hung up the phone...but maybe he shouldn't have been fucking Little Napoleon's best friend and fellow 'Lieutenant' while he was married (in addition to driving under the influence).[43]

The former Deputy Director of the Camp Lejeune Consolidated Public Affairs Office was slated to take over the office around the time he was kicked out of the Marine Corps. Our acting Public Affairs Office Director, Major Little, still executed his orders to his next duty station.

[43] The affair that the deputy Public Affairs director, a Major, was having with a 'Lieutenant' came out after the DUI arrest and became part of his legal proceedings. She might have been in his car when he got pulled over and arrested.

With both leaders gone, it was left to a young Mustang Captain and former infantry officer to lead us, his name was Riccoh Player.

* * * * *

I did my Masters' Thesis on something called 'Posture Mirroring'...this is a non-verbal form of mirroring a person's posture whom you are talking to and sitting across from; this is done to establish an unconscious connection with the other person that makes them feel you are sympatico.

Little Napoleon did this with numerous Generals and Colonels across Camp Lejeune...and that included the Chief of Staff of the base.

After several Camp Lejeune Generals complained to Headquarters Marine Corps about Little Napoleon's treatment in the office, it prompted a visit a couple of weeks after the trial of our Deputy Director of Public Affairs by the Deputy Director of Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs, Colonel Stuart Wagner...traveling down from the Pentagon.

Wagner gave a speech like the scene in Animal House where the ROTC commander uttered the words, "You are all worthless and weak." The office then became even more depleted because Little Napoleon had once again demonstrated her control not just upon the office and the base, but higher headquarters...as a 2nd Lieutenant.

On one of the days after this visit from headquarters, Captain Player sent an email to the base Chief of Staff...it informed him that if he kept on calling Little Napoleon at her residence every night, he would have to report him for fraternization. Both the Chief of Staff and Little Napoleon were married to other people.[44]

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[44] Fraternization in the military is prohibited personal relationships between military members of different ranks and positions.

It was less than five seconds after Captain Player sent the email to the Chief of Staff when his phone rang and he was summoned to the 'Chief's' office...Captain Player held his ground and from that day on, we were left alone to do our fucking job!

Captain Player, without thought of getting a good evaluation by the Chief of Staff and possibly ruining his future career in the Marine Corps...did what he thought was right.

I always look back on that time and what Captain Player did for us to the scene and emotion in the first Top Gun movie when the pilot with the callsign 'Iceman' says to Tom Cruise, "Bold move Mav!' (Mav...short for Tom Cruises character's callsign in the movie, 'Maverick'.)[45]

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At a certain point during my time at the Camp Lejeune Public Affairs office, Captain Player ordered me to attend a three-month course at Oklahoma University.

This course was for all public affairs personnel in the military and the focus was on conducting and 'taking apart' surveys...breaking them down.

This turned out to not only be a fun three months away from a military base, but it provided me with invaluable knowledge on how to find 'holes' in surveys that were critical to the Marine Corps and the Department of Defense.

Bottom Line: No-one should ever think their survey is 'perfect'...because if they say that, they are just opening themselves up for a counterattack in the world of public relations.

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As the Colonel kept taking a little tin canister out of his chest pocket, he would pop another nitrate pill for his

[45] Captain Player would go on to become Colonel Player.

heart...you see, the DACOWITS report had just been released and he, the Colonel, was in deep, deep, shit. [46]

His command, Camp Johnson, located aboard the entirety of the Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base, not only had the worst record in the Marine Corps, but they also earned 'top spot' for the worst record in the entire Department of Defense when it came to treating female service members with the respect and professionalism they deserve (according to the survey responses DACOWITS received).

This was the first, and not the last time I would encounter Marine warrior Colonels and Generals feeling more stressed-out regarding dealing with the media then going into and being in combat.

Enter Major Scott Jack...a former Public Affairs Officer that got accepted into the Marine Corps law program where the government pays you while you get your law degree.

Lawyers in the Marine Corps are referred to as 'SJA's (aka, Staff Judge Advocates).

Major Jack was a successful Staff Judge Advocate and minding his own business when the drama of our Deputy Public Affairs Officer scandal took place...and since the Generals wanted a senior ranking Public Affairs Officer at the Camp Lejeune Public Affairs office, they offered him a Judgeship in return for spending a couple of years as the director of all Public Affairs operations aboard Camp Lejeune.

When, in February of 1998, a Marine Corps jet severed a gondola cable in Italy, plunging 20 people more than 300

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[46] The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services ...aka DACOWITS, was established in 1951. The Committee is composed of civilian women and men appointed by the Secretary of Defense to provide advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces. https://dacowits.defense.gov

feet to their deaths, Major Jack was put in charge of handling the media coverage of the trial aboard Camp Lejeune...and I was so impressed with the dual skills of a Public Affairs Officer/lawyer to respond to media questions during a press conference, I sought out to become just like him.

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Just prior to the Deputy Director of our Public Affairs Office getting into trouble...he asked me if I wanted to deploy to Haiti for six months. I jumped at the chance to deploy to a conflict zone for the first time...and because he told me it would be a great opportunity.

Looking back after more than two decades in the Marine Corps, the Camp Lejeune Consolidated Public Affairs Office was one of my favorite tours I ever had in the Marine Corps.

Apparently, even before my arrival to the office and the Deputy Director scandal, there had been a previous public scandal of fraternization in the office that made the papers during the trial...but the office had heart.

The Public Affairs office was not just about mentoring junior Marines, it was about instituting a mindset of taking risks...but don't make the same mistake twice (because if you do, and I told you not to do it, are you fucking stupid?).

While 'Little Napoleon' wasn't a team player, the other Lieutenants were part of what we referred to as the 'LPA'...the Lieutenant Protection Association. So, if a Captain or Major were just complete 'dicks' to us, we would come together and bond over it; figure out a way ahead together.

As I mentioned before, this was before the internet took over the military and you were easily able to work out in the mornings or afternoons...and on Friday afternoons, we would play a long and exhausting game of ultimate football while barbecuing and drinking one or two beers.

One morning, while attempting to do 'behind the back' pullups, I pulled or injured a disc in my neck that is still with me to this day and limits my time in a chair sitting in front of a computer.

"His greatest contribution may well have come in his last two weeks. Handling public affairs for recovery of victims from the Pride of Gonave ferry disaster, he became a spokesperson for U.S. Forces, the State Department, and, de facto, the Government of Haiti. His accurate and timely management of information mitigated a situation which could potentially have led to a destabilization of the Government of Haiti."

USMC Fitness Report – Sept. 1997

Voodoo Sunk the 'Pride of Gonave'

I left for my first deployment to Haiti in February of 1997 with all my required gear...it filled three seabags and my military backpack.

When you deploy as an 'Individual Augment' (i.e., by yourself) you carry all your gear...and at some points it can be a very long 'trek'.[47]

This may have been the beginning of my lower back problems in addition to the neck injury I encountered just prior to this deployment.

I was exhausted upon arrival after being in the military travel system for the past 36 hours straight without laying down, it was the middle of the day, and I informed the person who was 'hosting' me upon arrival that I was going to take a 'nap'.

Apparently, my initiative to take a nap was not well received by the U.S. Support Group Haiti command group...and I received some 'digs' for it that didn't get me off to the great start I wanted.

So, for all four future combat deployments, no matter how many days I'd been traveling, even if it appeared like I could barely stand and I needed a shave...I would report into the Commanding Officer and ask to 'get right to work'![48]

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Cathy was an enlisted Sailor deployed out of the U.S. Navy Fleet Hometown News Center in Norfolk, Virginia...she was the one and only Public Affairs personnel assigned to

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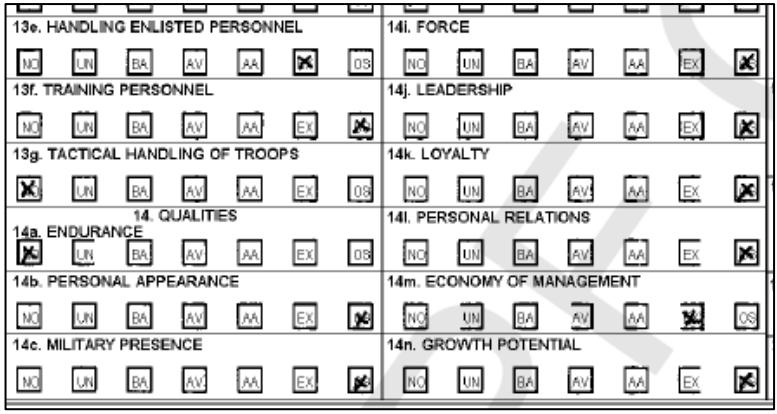
[47] By the time I went on my last combat deployment in 2012 as an Individual Augment, I would deploy with only one seabag and a backpack; anything else I needed I had mailed.

[48] And every time the Commanding Officer told me to 'get some rest' first.

the U.S. Support Group Haiti Public Affairs office in addition to me.[49]

I thought I was clear that when I gave her – her initial counseling that it wasn't official at that time, and I was following the official procedures for counseling I was taught at 'The Basic School' of infantry by the Marine Corps…but it blew up in my face because Cathy at the time thought it was permanent.

Regardless, the Executive Officer of the command, being one of two persons that would write my evaluations, found this management fiasco my fault and proceeded to mark me down in two categories: (13e) Management of Enlisted Personnel & (14m) Economy of Management.



Having a lower mark than 'OS' (for Outstanding) on your fitness report, in the Marine Corps at that time, was a career killer…and I didn't just have one, I had two!

Cathy and I would go on to be very successful in Haiti in addition to having a great working relationship.

[49] The Fleet Hometown News Center in Norfolk, Virginia, at that time, was a command that would produce press releases for Navy and Marine Corps personnel when they got promoted or received a medal…then they would send it to their local hometown papers.

I would also credit her with 'getting out of the office' almost every day. She was a great driver and navigator around the capital city of Port-au-Prince.

It's extremely important that if you can venture off your military installation in a foreign country that you do so because you not only get a better feel for how the local community views the military presence in their country, but you also get to experience a new culture and new foods.[50]

One of the best things I learned while in Haiti, was to bargain on the streets with the venders.

On almost every one of my deployments there would be servicemembers that never left the base and they also didn't work well with other personnel from the different service branches.

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"U.S. Support Group Haiti Public Affairs, this is Lt. Upton," I said as I answered the phone.

"Is this the person that got the story on CNN," asked the former Commanding Officer of the 'U.S. Support Group Haiti', an Army Colonel, who was now back in the United States.

"Yes, well, I helped coordinate them..." I started to say before he cut me off.

"We tried all year while I was there and they tried the year before to get a story on CNN about the Humanitarian Assistance efforts there...and I just want to first say 'thank you' and 'job well done'; all the best," and then the Army Colonel hung up the phone.

The reason the Army Colonel called me was because it was a common frustration of seeing not just all the great things

[50] I would contract food poisoning twice in the eight months I was in Haiti, but it didn't stop me from eating or drinking at the eateries we (or the command) visited.

we were doing (building schools, bridges and conducting medical and dental clinics) but the need of the kids in that country that was not being covered by the national media back home.

While the military commands that served in Haiti could get 'local' reporting on their efforts back home, the coverage never expanded beyond that.

I honestly can't remember how, in August of 1997, I ran into the crew from CNN in Haiti...I think it could have been at the U.S. Ambassador's residence during one of his many gatherings.

The CNN producer told me they didn't have time to visit any of our 'Humanitarian Assistance' operations...but I asked for their itinerary anyway.

CNN would only be in town (Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince) for the next day, and they were pretty much booked, but we were operating a couple of medical and dental clinics in the city that day.

So, I set up a proposed itinerary for CNN during the time they had blocked off for lunch that could get them to these Humanitarian Assistance clinics, meet with Commanding Officers for interviews, and return to their planned schedule...and it would also add another productive story for this aggressive crew.

I think what really helped me out, although I didn't realize it until I worked on the Department of Defense 'Press Desk' at the Pentagon years later...is that I put together our narrative with talking points and I gave it to them on a silver platter, i.e., spoon feeding the media or basically making it effortless for them to give the story a chance.



While it worked, CNN got the names of the Commanding Officers (Overall base Commander and the Senior medical Commander) switched in the video report...I spent the next week dealing with the commanders asking for me to try and get that fixed with no success. (Reference #9)

And even though it never aired...a standup interview with CNN about what the 'U.S. Support Group Haiti' was doing in Haiti was the best media interview I ever did in my career...but it was great experience.



Another thing my peers back at Camp Lejeune's Consolidated Public Affairs Office would 'dig' me on (in addition to the telephone book cover) is how many times my photo appeared in the local Jacksonville Daily news with Haitian kids either grabbing my leg or me holding an infant...I always approached dealing with the Haitians at medical Humanitarian Assistance operations with the same fearless mindset that Mother Teresa would.

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I asked, "What do you mean she put a 'voodoo' curse on me?"

ANSWER: "She said she put a voodoo curse on you because you didn't tell her that you were bringing media to the school opening," said the Army Major (last name Rodriguez) in charge of the section that found Haitian schools for rebuilding or places for schools to build from the ground up.

The Major wasn't joking or lying to me...he added that she, the manager, or principal of the school, told him she was going to make a 'Voodoo Doll' of me and 'stick needles in it' to my dismay.

As I worked long hours in the office in the days and months after the school opening, I did experience a burning in an area on my back, like a cigarette burning me...and I always wondered if it was because that woman had stuck a needle in me and didn't take it out; I wondered if there were expiration dates to this voodoo torture.

Also spelled 'Vodou', Voodoo is a 'spiritual' religion forged by descendants of ethnic groups who had been enslaved and brought to Haiti and then Christianized by Roman Catholic missionaries in the 16th and 17th Centuries...its fundamental principle is that everything is spirit. Humans are spirits who inhabit the visible world. (Reference #10)

I'm sure there are very positive aspects to religions that have a basis in 'peace' and 'love'...but I found most of what the U.S. Servicemembers were taught about Voodoo in

Haiti and what we experienced didn't reflect positively and garnered my fear.

For example, at one of the medical clinics we did, a very beautiful Haitian girl in a very clean, white dress, was seeking treatment for her arm that she had broken some years ago in a bicycle accident; apparently, she was taken to a 'Voodoo doctor' vice a 'medical doctor' (or no medical services existed near here at that time) ...the Voodoo doctor tied the girl's 'forearm' to her 'shoulder' and sent her home to heal.

But instead of healing correctly, the girl's forearm fused to her shoulder...to this day, this visual memory is probably one of the most heart wrenching things I have to live with from my military service.

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"Instability in Haiti is cyclical," U.S. Marine Corps General John J. Sheehan told a group of officers and enlisted leaders that had gathered in a room at the U.S. Support Group Haiti for what is referred to as PME (Primary Military Education).

Sheehan at the time, was the CINC (Commander in Chief) for the U.S. Atlantic Command that had the country of Haiti within the command's regional coverage...he is one of many very tall generals I would encounter in my career with a charismatic leadership style that could easily 'work' an entire room or large gathering.[51]

[51] The CINC, 'Commander and Chief' title was changed in 2002 when Donald Rumsfeld was in his second appointment as the Secretary of Defense. The new title for the military's top leaders of regional commands then came to be known as, "Combatant Commanders.' This was due to the President of the United States having an issue with military commanders being referred to as 'Commanders and Chief'.



U.S. Marine Corps General John J. Sheehan talking with a Reuters photographer in Haiti. That's the back of my head.

The General also brought with him a security assessment group that pointed out to us how we were being 'monitored' and 'tracked' from the moment we leave our base located in Port-au-Prince.

I had gotten in trouble not once, but twice, even after this briefing for having the 'jack' stolen out of the back of my vehicle while going through the nearby roundabout because I left the door unlocked...then a Haitian stole the hat off my head in the same roundabout via a very tiny window crack I allowed in the passenger door.

While we were issued 'pepper spray'...word among the military personnel that regularly had the cause to discharge it upon Haitians in the city, is that the Haitians would put lemon juice all over their face before engaging U.S. forces to reduce (or eliminate) their skin burning from the spray.

For the entire time of my military service in Haiti during 1997, while at times stuck in traffic, I would feel the need to 'chamber a round' in my Beretta 9mm...but the only close call of exchanging gunfire was during an overnight duty post by an 18-year-old Marine who discovered a

Haitian had a gun across the street from him and was pointing it at him. The Marine responded by 'sighting-in' back on the Haitian but didn't fire and eventually, the Haitian left without incident.

The young Marine on duty would have been authorized to shoot and kill the Haitian because his life was threatened (not to mention the pathway into our base command) ...but if he had shot and killed the Haitian, there would have been rumors and disinformation throughout the city and country regarding the 'killing' that would have led to protests and possibly deaths.

I remember everyone in the command the next day (and at the U.S. Embassy) felt relief for avoiding an incident that could have spiraled out of control...but mostly I remember how everyone talked about the 'poise', 'judgement', and 'restraint' displayed by the one Marine on duty.

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About the middle part of 1997, the responsibility for Haiti shifted from the U.S. 'Atlantic' command and General Sheehan to U.S. 'Southern' Command and U.S. Army General Wesley K. Clark Sr.

Even before Ron Burgundy and the movie 'Anchorman' said that 'Ron' will read anything placed on the teleprompter, General Clark's speechwriter told me during an event in Haiti that the general was speaking at...that he could write anything in a speech and put it in front of the general and he would 'read it' without even knowing what he was saying.[52]

One of my two best experiences in Haiti involved the gatherings at the U.S. Ambassador's residence...the Honorable William L. Swing.

[52] During my speechwriting days later in my career, this statement would turn out to be truer for 'busy' generals than false.

Ambassador Swing was always smiling, positive, and would make sure he shook your hand and spoke with everyone at these gatherings. The free flow of hors d'oeuvres and beer is also happily noted...it was my first experience of the type of 'high-life' gatherings the 'rich & famous' have.

General Clark was not as 'social' as the Ambassador or General Sheehan but there was a constant flow of VIPs into Haiti...such as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations at the time, Bill Richardson, and U.S. House of Representatives Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi *(pictured with me on the right shaking my hand).*



This is me pictured with Nancy Pelosi during her visit to Haiti in 1997.

Pelosi took my parents phone number and told me she would call them, but she never did.

Richardson was in Haiti for the opening of a new bridge that had been built by U.S. Navy Seabees engineers, but also because the overall humanitarian mission was United Nations led.

This was also a time when relations between the U.S. and Pakistan was good, and we would meet with Pakistani troops we referred to as our 'partners' on evenings in Port-au-Prince...I very much enjoyed my meetings (and cigars) with my Pakistani Public Affairs counterparts.

Haiti was also my first experience working with the State Department Public Affairs Officers...and getting along with them.

The State Department Public Affairs Officers were essential to briefing me on the American and International media in Haiti, which consisted of one Associated Press reporter & photographer...with the same for Reuters.

The local media in Haiti would be broadcast or published in French or a French-based Haitian Creole...and the State Department had personnel that would translate their media reports.

The other thing I realized about working with anyone in the State Department is that they take diligent notes of all conversations and then they include your name in reports they send up to their bosses and higher commands...this seemed to be a daily requirement anytime they had interactions with someone outside of the State Department.

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"You'll get a better grade if you don't show up to class," my sophomore high school 'honors' English teacher told me; and my junior high school English teacher told me the same...these teachers were not very good at their jobs and my mother, as a member of the school board, didn't like them; and so, the feeling was mutual.[53]

But while I enjoyed the extra time before lunch hour to walk a mile or so and take advantage of Round Table Pizza's lunch deal with one of my best friends, Robert...I arrived at college testing at such a low English level, I had to enroll in what is called, 'Dumbbell English'.

So, when I arrived in Haiti my spelling and essay writing skills were not the best...but two things went in my favor, (1) writing a press release or responding to media queries doesn't require you to conform to the rules of English class essays (in fact, it's frowned upon) & (2) Microsoft word

[53] One of the teachers was a well-known drug addict and the other would continue his string of DUI arrests.

was just installed on computers throughout the Department of Defense (correcting my spelling as needed).

The main thing I came to feel about writing press releases was to #1, make sure you communicate what your objective is as close to the introduction as you can (or make your main statement as the introduction) and #2, make the rest of your press release as short and as to the point as possible.

* * * * *

While Haiti wasn't my first experience working in a 'joint' military environment with all the services, it was the first time I was deployed in what is referred to as a 'purple' environment.[54]

I would encounter overweight Marines that worked in other sections and came to realize I had no authority to talk to them because their boss outranked me and was from another service.

Then there was the time I tried to counsel Air Force personnel for saluting me while in 'workout' gear...apparently, while the Marine Corps doesn't salute while out of uniform, the Air Force does.

One night, after the small bar located aboard base overserved wayyyyyyy beyond the two-beer limit to the packed 'joint' service crowd...words were exchanged and a 'service' fight broke out that closed the bar down for two weeks...and I was counseled again.

Lastly, there was a 'leadership' group that would meet every couple of weeks, and you had to be invited by the group to join. The group would meet at what was referred to as the 'Old Marine House' located in Port-au-Prince where Marines had stayed during previous deployments

[54] A 'Joint' military command means military personnel from all the 'services' (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) are assigned to it. It is also referred to as a 'purple' command.

to Haiti...and let me just say, Haitian rum is some of the best rum in the world.

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After a certain point, nobody from the government of Haiti was showing up...and nobody from the U.S. State Department wanted to go down to the shoreline where the hundreds of dead bodies were floating to the surface.

As I sat on the ground looking off into the sunset, there was an overwhelming strong smell of vinegar in the air as purple-colored bloated bodies surfaced from a ferry that had sunk days before...U.S. Navy divers were at the bottom of the ocean floor retrieving deceased passengers that had gotten trapped prior to the ferry sinking.

Just days before, angry relatives of those who drowned when the ferry sank burned a ferry belonging to a competing line...saying the rival owner used voodoo to cause the catastrophe. (Reference #11)

The relatives were also angry at the slow response of the government to recover the estimated 269 passengers (not including children) ...it would be four days from the date of the incident to when the U.S. Navy divers showed up; and even then, recovery operations would be further delayed while the sunken ferry was stabilized.

When the Navy divers first arrived on site out at sea, I arrived on shore nearby where there was a waiting crowd of families clamoring for the recovery efforts to begin immediately.

I had brought with me four 3x5 cards; one side had what I wanted to say in French, and on the backside, I had it in English. I had never studied or spoken French, but I had practiced with a few native speakers before arriving and they told me I would 'do fine'.

There would be a couple of times in my military career while on deployment in a foreign land, when I'd get myself

quickly surrounded by a large crowd in public...and as the crowd noticed me, this would be the first time.

As the crowd started yelling and/or shouting, they started jumping up and down with their fists raised ...I backed myself up against a wall. The wall was about six feet tall, made of adobe with a wide girth; so, I climbed atop of it, took out my 3x5 cards in French and began to speak.

All of sudden the crowd calmed down and listened...I basically told them we would, "stay until all of the bodies are recovered."

And then, it was over...the families had gotten the answers they were looking for and the energy of the crowd dissipated.

What had been a display of anger and frustration some thought could cause an overthrow of the country because of Haiti's inability to recover the bodies...turned into gratefulness for the U.S. to show up and assure the families their loved ones would be recovered.

After I climbed down off the wall, the Haitians shook my hand and patted me on the back as the crowd walked off.

The last time I had looked into people's eyes, wide open, with tears coming down their face was when I presented the American Flag to the family at the end of a funeral (mentioned in the previous chapter).

Lastly, as I looked over old press clippings from this incident, I remembered a mistake I'd made...

During one of the visits to the shore with my Commanding Officer, this was the first (and last) time I tried to step in front of a reporter to block their path.

When I attempted to do this to CNN reporter Susan Candiotti, she simply stepped around me and then asked my boss why I tried to block her.

While we weren't there for a press conference, my boss was there and the press was expected to be there...so, he was fair game, and I should have prepped him.

*****

I encountered more dead people in Haiti on this deployment than my next four combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan...but what worried me most was my mouth getting me in trouble.

"That's an unquotable quote," the Associated Press reporter told me after I said something logical about higher command's management of Haiti...it was something, that if reported, would cause controversy and be a career killer (in my opinion at the time).

Beyond being a part of an emergency or a planned overnight training, the first night I just laid in bed all night, worrying about a possible 'bad quote' by me in the newspapers the next morning was that night...I remember waiting outside the gym at 5am for it to open, just restless.

This would be the first of many sleepless nights over my next couple of decades of service, worrying not about the public's interpretation of my comments...but my bosses, and their bosses, and then their boss's interpretation.

* * * * *

The outside air in Haiti on most days was composed of the smell of burning tires and shit in the streets (from both people and animals) ...going for a jog was probably unhealthier for you, than healthy.

But while I was happy to return stateside in Sept. of 1997, after a little over seven months in Haiti...I remember becoming emotional in the days after arriving back to Camp Lejeune just reflecting on the 'impact' of the deployment on me and the 'toll' it took on me stress wise.

BT

UNCLAS //N05060//

SUBJ: BRAVO ZULU TO JOINT PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE, MCAS NEW RIVER//

RMKS/

1. I WANT TO EXTEND MY HEARTFELT CONGRATULATIONS TO THE STAFF OF THE ROTOVUE NEWSPAPER, JOINT PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE, MCAS NEW RIVER, FOR CAPTURING FIRST PLACE IN THE CIVILIAN ENTERPRISE NEWSPAPER (TABLOID) CATEGORY IN THIS YEAR'S DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE THOMAS JEFFERSON AWARDS COMPETITION. ADDITIONALLY, I WANT TO CONGRATULATE THE JOINT PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE STAFF FOR TAKING FIRST PLACE IN THE INTERNET WEBSITE CATEGORY DURING THIS YEAR'S MARINE CORPS DIVISION OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS MERIT AWARD COMPETITION.

2. THESE JOURNALISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS ARE ADAMANTLY SOUGHT AFTER BY YOUR PEERS THROUGHOUT THE ARMED FORCES, AND RESPECTED BY YOUR CIVILIAN COUNTERPARTS. YOUR EXTRAORDINARY EFFORTS AND TALENT IN SUCCESSFULLY TELLING THE MARINE CORPS STORY REFLECT YOUR PROFESSIONALISM AS MARINES AND AS PUBLIC AFFAIRS PRACTICIONERS. AGAIN, CONGRATRULATIONS ON A TRULY OUTSTANDING JOB. SEMPER FIDELIS, LTGEN. PACE SENDS.

Official USMC Message Traffic, May 20, 1999 – From the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Marine Corps General Peter Pace, who was then, a Lieutenant General and the Commander of Marine Forces Atlantic

McHoax

"Happy to be here Sir," I told the Commanding Officer of Marine Corps Air Station New River as I sat in his office on the day I arrived and 'checked in' to my next job...his response, "You should be."

He was a Marine Colonel and didn't want me to be 'his' (or the command's) Director of Public Affairs...and that went for his deputy commander, a Lieutenant Colonel, as well.

Why this hostility towards me???

You see, I had been selected while I was in Haiti by Major Scott Jack, who was still the director of Public Affairs for the Consolidated Public Affairs Office (CPAO) at Camp Lejeune, to become the next director of Public Affairs for Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) New River...which was located basically across the street from Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, NC.

Public Affairs personnel movements and billets are almost always assigned by Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs 'Plans' section; but since the next Public Affairs director for MCAS New River needed to come from the Camp Lejeune CPAO personnel, Major Jack was asked and/or allowed to make this decision.

Well, unbeknownst to me, while I was in Haiti, Little Napoleon was attending a night school master's program with not only the current Public Affairs director at MCAS New River, but the Commanding Officer of MCAS New River...and they all decided it would be better if Little Napoleon took over MCAS New River Public Affairs, vice myself.

But Major Jack and Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs proved more powerful than the New River Commanding Officer and I arrived at an office of Marine

Public Affairs personnel that didn't seem to want me to be there either.

Not long after I checked into MCAS New River and completed my turnover with the outgoing Public Affairs director (it seemed like maybe a week or two) ...I got a phone call alerting me that the Commanding Officer had just been relieved of his command for inappropriate use of a military aircraft to attend his daughter's college graduation.

While the Commanding Officer was not very nice to me...I covered his ass the best I could to protect him and his family for what must have been a very difficult time.

About a week later, there would be a 'going away' gathering at the former Commanding Officer's residence and I was invited...that's when the Colonel personally walked up to me, shook my hand, and thanked me for how I handled the media coverage.

Enter Colonel Gerald Yanello, the next Commanding Officer for MCAS New River.

* * * * *

"Who's on First?" the Gunny Sergeant kept trying to tell me.

And just like the famous 'Abbott & Costello' comedy routine, I kept asking the Gunny, "What's the name of the guy on first?"

"No, what's on second," he said.

Now, while those obviously were not the exact words exchanged between Gunnery Sergeant Tudor (I've forgotten his first name) and myself one morning PT (physical training) session with both the Public Affairs unit and the Combat Camera unit...it was reflective of my attempts to be a 'gung-ho' & 'in-charge' Marine Lieutenant.

Gunnery Sergeant Tudor was the senior enlisted non-commissioned officer for Combat Camera...and because at

MCAS New River the Combat Camera unit fell under the Director of Public Affairs, activities such as PT and other unit training were regularly scheduled together.

Combat Camera units in the Marine Corps are photographic, video, and graphic design specialists that work primarily for the 'Operations' section of commands documenting events or exercises, promotion photos, etc. ...as well as creating psychological warfare products (i.e., leaflets, videos, etc.) in the war zone.

While it's not exactly a written policy...Marine Gunnery Sergeants, Sergeants Major, Master Gunnery Sergeants, Master Sergeants, and 1st Sergeants are all required to help mentor and 'bring along' young Lieutenants.

If, after talking with a senior enlisted leader you still disagreed with them...you usually got a call from the Commanding Officer or Executive Officer not a long time after confirming the senior enlisted leader's recommendation.

So, technically, even though officers outrank enlisted service members, these actions are not improper or unethical...it's about leadership and the Senior Enlisted looking out for troop welfare.

* * * * *

The Public Affairs director I replaced was leaving active duty and the office mindset and work ethic seemed very, very relaxed...with Marines expecting civilian work hours, lunch breaks at the same time every day, and daily workouts that lasted hours.

It also seemed like I received 'push-back' every time I asked them to do a task that was beyond the 4:30 PM workday.

This was the first, but not the last time that I would walk into an office that lacked a 'work ethic'.

It would also not be the last time I arrived at a new duty station after previously having a successful tour...only to

fuck things up 'big-time' because I thought the success from one duty station would 'carry over' to my next one.

As part of my undergraduate degree in Political Science, I took the option to study management in the government via my college's 'Public Administration' option. While focused on the government, the studies included private sector business management.[55]

The study of management started with a man by the name of Frederick Taylor, who, in the 1880s used 'time & motion' studies as a management tool (Reference #12) ...it was considered a 'Scientific Approach' to management. For example, how many toys can one person build in a day.

Then, in the 1920s, studies were conducted on workers at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company by Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger that discovered increased productivity by taking an approach that considered 'social factors'—such as the people they worked with in their office (or on their team) and the amount of interest their manager had in their work (Reference #13) ...a 'Human Approach' to management is what this was considered...for example, a boss walking around the office, talking to personnel and thanking them for their hard work.

Every management concept taught after learning about these two management styles was some hybrid mix of a scientific method with consideration for the human factors...the difference each time would be how much weight (or thought) went into either the 'Scientific' or 'Human' approach.

Lastly, there was the 'Zone of Indifference' which basically is your management zone where you tell an employee to do something, and if they don't do it...how long do you wait or how many times do you tell them to do it before you resort

[55] I completed my Master's in Public Administration around this time as well.

to authoritarian actions (i.e., writing up an employee, or threatening to write up an employee)? (Reference #14).

One of my last classes on Public Administration management was a theory for a 'City Manager' to consider all the information and facts pertaining to a decision...yet this isn't possible in the real world regarding knowing everything before you make a decision and having the time to do it.

In the end, at a certain point, a leader needs to decide with their knowledge, known facts, and personal experiences...but most of all, and even in a combat zone, with their intuition (aka, 'gut feeling').

Yet, even with this knowledge, as I tried to find out 'who was doing what' in the office, I caught a Marine writing down his daily activities as he did them...probably losing about 25% of his productivity because I had given the perception that he needed to do that for me.

My management oversight and change in office focus 'shocked' the Marines in a lot of ways to the point where one of the Corporals in the office decided he would stop by Gunnery Sergeant Tudor's residence before he went home to put on his Marine Corps 'Dress Blues' uniform...then go to the office and kill everybody.

The Gunny Sergeant said the Corporal was going to kill my deputy first, which maybe meant it all wasn't totally my fault...but it was totally my fault.

They released the Marine that night from custody and I was sleepless for the next week or so...a poor cab driver one night decided to turn his car around in my Jacksonville, NC driveway during this time and he had a gun put on him as I kept asking him, "Where the fuck is the person you just dropped off?"

This would also not be the last time I would be told by senior leadership to, 'take your foot off the gas' regarding my management style or work ethic...I took the criticism to heart.

* * * * *

The top awards for practitioners of Public Affairs in the Department of Defense in 1999, were referred to as the 'Thomas Jefferson Awards' (i.e., the 'TJs' as we referred to them).

To me, the reason why these awards were so valuable was due to the judges that made the decisions...they were not affiliated with the Department of Defense and worked at places like USA Today, Associated Press, The New York Times, CNN, etc. They were the best of the best!

So, in 1999, when we basically won two of these awards as a unit (which was kind of unheard of) ...people took notice, and we received such things as the message from General Pace located at the beginning of this chapter.

The categories for newspapers in the Thomas Jefferson award process (at the time) included an award for a 'Tabloid' format...basically meaning the paper looks like the New York Post does on the newsstands (a square shape) versus how the New York Times looks (in a rectangle shape).

The editor of our 'Tabloid' format newspaper was a Corporal that at some point probably could have collapsed at her desk due to the time and effort she put into graphic design and layout of the paper...she was the main effort behind our office winning the award.

To make it to the Thomas Jefferson competition for judging against nominations from the other military services, you must first win at the 'Service' level...for the Marine Corps, these awards were referred to as the 'Merit' awards.

In 1999, with the internet taking off, a new category was introduced for the Marine Corps Merit awards, but not at the Thomas Jefferson/Department of Defense level...it was for a Public Affairs command Internet Website.

I had bought such books as 'Internet programming for Dummies' (so-to-speak) and set up a 'cell' in the office to

work on developing our website with the senior Staff Sergeant in the office leading the effort.

Somehow, someway, it all came together, and I think we won the award for our website not so much because we were great…but we might have been one of the only entries for the new category that year; but we were definitely leading the rest of the Marine Corps and the Department of Defense (in regard to Public Affairs).

After we won the awards and the Corporal, and the Staff Sergeant were recognized as part of our celebration…the wins just felt empty because I felt the office still resented me for the management 'shock' I gave to them.[56]

I thought because I was a 'prior enlisted' Marine, that management of the junior enlisted would be easy…because I use to be one of them. But that would not be the case for me.

* * * * *

"Can we get out and walk on 'em?"

Prior to my father's passing, he told me that question I asked him when I was a child sitting in the passenger seat of a Cessna he was flying as we looked out at large clusters of clouds was his favorite memory of me as a kid.

While my father had a LOVE of flying…I didn't hate it, and I liked 'taking the controls', but I didn't have that look in my eyes like my father and all of the other pilots I've met in my life have…part adrenalin, part addiction; I honestly felt at times my father thought he was an eagle with wings playing around up in the air.

But while I lacked a desire to learn how to fly an aircraft, I developed a love for a certain aircraft…the MV-22 (Marine Vertical and Short Take-off and Landing aircraft; 22nd

[56] While both the Corporal and the Staff Sergeant had planned to depart the Marine Corps prior to my arrival at MCAS New River, each was offered numerous (lucrative) job offers from the private sector due to their skills and achievements.

design model). It is this aircraft that can take off like a helicopter and then tilt the rotors to fly like a plane with passengers and/or equipment.



Photo by Veronica Mammina, courtesy of the U.S. Navy via DVIDS.

Since the first MV-22 test squadron was slated to 'stand-up' at Marine Corps Air Station New River, I took it upon myself to start developing detailed Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) on the aircraft that went well beyond what previously existed at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs.

When they handed over the first MV-22 squadron command 'colors' (i.e., a flag) to the Lieutenant Colonel squadron commander, whose call sign was 'Zeus', lightening reigned down from the sky as if it was a sign from God (or the 'Gods') that this was a monumental moment for the Marine Corps and for 'Zeus'.[57]

* * * * *

I said the following comments in the cockiest, condescending, juvenile, and hard-headed tone:

[57] In early 2001, CBS News and 60 MINUTES would report on secret recordings made of meetings at this test squadron in which the squadron commander, 'Zeus', appeared to suggest maintenance files should be falsified. Shortly thereafter, he was relieved of command.

"You just don't want to let the public know that your 'third' and last winner of the 'Monopoly' game has happened because it will hurt your sales...because your advertising says the game is going to continue for the next two weeks."

But the spokesperson for McDonalds was correct in continually repeating that she knew for a fact that there was no 'third' and final winner of their Monopoly game yet...she advised me to correct our press releases regarding a Marine at our command claiming to have the final winning ticket.

Now, at some point, when I realized she was correct and a Marine from one of the squadrons was lying about having won the million-dollar prize...I was sitting at my desk and then I slowly put my head down on the desk to think of how in the fuck I was going to 'dig myself out' of this one.

It all started when I got a call from one of the two squadron commanders aboard Marine Corps Air Station New River that one of his Marines had won the McDonald's Monopoly game one-million-dollar prize. He said, "that ought to be worth a story or a 'press release," ...and I agreed.

So, we did a print story, a video interview, and a press release that made regional media in the North Carolina area...and then the calls from McDonalds came.

By the time the Marine confessed, he had left for another command and that Public Affairs Officer had to clean up my mess...I would have felt bad about it, but it was Little Napoleon, and boy was she was not happy about it.[58]

The next cover of Marine Corps Times had McDonald's golden arches for the 'M' that spelled out the word, "McHoax," ...now the story made national coverage.

[58] Media reports say that the Marine was placed in the Brig on only Food and Water for a couple of days after he confessed.

So, just to be clear...an average good news story made regional/state coverage; a massive 'fuck up' to a good news story makes national media coverage.

Major Jack told me after it was over, "hey, next time, ask to see the ticket or some proof before you do the press blitz."

* * * * *

In the middle of the night, bored, and without power, I went out into the eye of hurricane 'Bertha' at my residence in Jacksonville, NC and hugged the large tree in my back yard.

I was in awe of the energy and destruction this hurricane brought to the east coast.

The deputy of the Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune Consolidated Public Affairs Office had taken the job of working out of the Command Operations Center (COC) aboard base as the hurricane passed through and he appeared on national cable news stations overnight.

After a couple of months, we received word of a second hurricane, 'Fran', coming our way and I asked to work out of the Command Operations Center overnight to 'go where the action is' and continue to get Public Affairs experience.

During my time at Camp Lejeune's Public Affairs office and the Marine Corps Air Station New River Public Affairs office, I would volunteer to assist with any major scandals or events I could be a part of.

It was during this time; CBS's 60 MINUTES would receive a video of Marines hazing their fellow Marines that just completed Airborne School. Senior Marines in the unit would punch, bite, and twist a 'gold wing' chest pin into chests of the new graduates.

The 'blood wing' controversy (as it became referred to) even ensnared the Commandant of the Marine Corps at the time regarding possible hazing rituals he may have

participated in previously in his college days and professional career.

For the first round of the 'blood wing' story, Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs handled the media response...but after that calmed down and a second video tape surfaced, Camp Lejeune's Public Affairs office was tasked with handling it because the unit where the video tapes came from was based there.

This would become a regular trend of media coverage of a major controversy...the first-round garners national/international media coverage and the second one has about 25% of that impact with not only the media, but the public.

For example, in 2010 Rolling Stone magazine published an article titled, 'Runaway General' that eventually got a commanding general in Afghanistan relieved of command by the President...about eight months later, the magazine tried their luck again and published an article titled 'Another Runaway General' that had minimal impact versus the first storyline's impact on the public.

* * * * *

"GET ME THE FUCK OUT OF HERE"

That's what I yelled into my cell phone to the head planner at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs that had the power to 'cut orders' and move Marine Public Affairs Officers from one duty station to the next.

I'd had it with the Executive Officer (i.e., XO) ...the carryover from the first Commanding Officer I had at Marine Corps Air Station New River that didn't want me at the command wasn't going away.

It just wasn't working out with the XO and it was obvious to me that I wouldn't get a 'fair shake' from him and he would continuously take actions detrimental to my career.

One time, after getting in my car for a ride home after an exercise, he counseled me for the doors locking

automatically when the vehicle went into drive...how in the fuck is that my fault??? (it was the way the Ford truck was built)

I had been in the region for about four years and so I was due for a 'change of station' anyway and there was an opening in Quantico, Virginia...so, I took it.

After that, I declined the medal the XO had submitted for me.

Colonel Yanello, the Commanding Officer, was down from his upstairs office about five seconds after I sent the email.

You know, I think Colonel Yanello got a very small taste of what my parents had to deal with as I 'banged my head' into problems or people I faced...but with his patience, showing he was listening to me, and his guidance, I reconsidered my decision.

He didn't want me to leave and asked me what the reason was for my departure...I just told him it was a normal rotation, but he knew it was due to the incompetent Executive Officer.



Colonel Gerald Yanello awarding me the Navy Achievement medal in the summer of 1999 at U.S. Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina.

"I don't care if you're fucking an elephant…as long as you're not covering the circus."

Max Frankel, former editor of the New York Times – March 7, 2000

The Times of My Life
&
My Life with the Times

They say that Marine Corps Base Quantico is the 'Crossroads of the Marine Corps' because what goes on there touches every part of the Marine Corps (Reference #15) ...but I've also heard that it was given that label because at some point in your Marine Corps career, you pass through Quantico Marine Corps Base located approximately 30 miles south of Washington, DC (and the Pentagon) along the Potomac River in Prince William County, Virginia.

The meaning, the point, the logical reasoning behind moving Marines around every couple of years or so to be 'plopped' down in a new job and duty station is to have personnel that can do that in war. A skillset that enables you to be 'dropped' down in a new location and learn any job quickly is what the Marines and the military are all about.

Around the time I arrived at Quantico, I'd come to the realization that it took me about six months on a new job to start 'locking shit down'. Before those six months would pass, I would make mistakes, blunders, and offend folks.

So, while folks may refer to Marine Corps Base Quantico as the 'Crossroads of the Marine Corps' ...after six months, I referred to it as Headquarters Marine Corps 'South'; with the actual Headquarters for the Marine Corps located at the Pentagon.

Here is a list of some of the commands aboard MCB Quantico:

1. The hierarchical command aboard base is referred to by its acronym, MCCDC: Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

That means every command that follows is subordinate to the Marine Corps Combat Development Command except numbers 2 & 3.

a. Manpower & Reserve Affairs...all personnel matters throughout the Marine Corps.

b. Training & Education Command. The policy set by this command reverberates throughout the Marine Corps, such as fitness tests and identifying mandatory degrees to be even considered for promotion to the next rank.

c. MARCORSYSCOM: Marine Corps Systems Command, they handle the development of new gear, uniforms, weapons, etc.

d. HMX-1: The Presidential Helicopter Squadron (i.e., Marine One) they also have a testing unit for new aircraft.

e. Marine Corps University. The study of warfighting.

f. OCS: Officer Candidate School, the (only) bootcamp for all Marine Corps officers, both male and female.

g. TBS: The Big Suck, no wait, I'm sorry, 'The Basic School' ...which is a six-month basic infantry course that all U.S. Marine Corps officers must go through as I wrote about in a previous chapter along with attending Officer Candidate School bootcamp...

h. U.S. Marine Corps Embassy security school. All the Marines you see guarding U.S. Embassies around the world went through this school.

i. Marine Corps (Computer) Network Operations Center (aka MCNOC, pronounced 'Mc-Knock').

j. U.S. Marine Sniper school.

k. Commanding General of Marine Corps Base Quantico and below him or her were all Marine Corps Installations/bases in the National Capital Region.

2. There is actually a town called 'Quantico' aboard the base where civilians live and apparently consume a large number of drugs.

3. Finally, the 'Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Directorate', which is a Department of Defense command. They develop foam that can stop you from running (or moving) and lasers that shoot heat rays at crowds to disperse them.

Back in 1999 when I arrived, all these commands relied on the Quantico Marine Corps Base Public Affairs to handle media queries for them.

Yet now, most, if not all these commands, have their own Public Affairs 'assistants', Strategic Communications personnel, and even some 'speechwriters'.

* * * * *

The person in charge of the Quantico Marine Corps Base Public Affairs Office when I arrived was Major Rosanne L. Sgrignoli. She directed me to work out of the media section...and that is where I would stay for the next approximately two years until I would leave Quantico and transfer duty stations again.

It would not be more than a couple of weeks or maybe a month before she would join me in the media section as a retiring Lieutenant Colonel from Headquarters Marine

Corps Public Affairs would arrive to take over while he finished out his remaining year or so until retirement.

I will refer to this Lieutenant Colonel as '05MB' ...and that translates to:

O = Officer

5 = Lieutenant Colonel

MB = 'Mixed Bag'

I refer to him as a 'Mixed Bag' because you didn't always know what you were going to get when you dealt with him.

My working relationship with 05MB got off to an outstanding start when he reminded me of my McHoax 'Golden Arches' fuckup...and that he didn't think much of me.

You see, while I avoided my name in any of the McHoax coverage...Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs knew exactly who fucked it up!

* * * * *

"Reporters are smarter than (military) Public Affairs Officers."

That's what 05MB said to me in his office while we talked over a media query we'd received.

I was indifferent to the comment at the time because I wasn't the one making the decision on how to handle this query...he was.

Then, 05MB changed the subject; he'd received a call from Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs, and I was to escort a recently hired reporter for the Wall Street Journal by the name of Greg Jaffe to the new Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) and provide him with any information he requested.

The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program was a great new program initiated into the Marine Corps by General James

L. Jones just after he became Commandant of the Marine Corps…it was based upon his observations of Martial Arts being used in Vietnam.

To me, this is the type of program that I joined the Marines for; to learn how to defend myself and kill others if need be…and that's exactly what I told my Dad when he asked me why I signed up to join the Marines.

Up until the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program was introduced, there was one day of boxing in enlisted boot camp, a couple of days of pugil stick training, and some knife attack training…but that was it for training that could be considered for 'self-defense' or learning how to kill someone (other than the rifle range training).

So, I set up a visit by Jaffe to the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program where he could observe some of the training and ask questions to Lieutenant Colonel George Bristol, one of the main architects of the program.

During a demonstration, Bristol held a Ka-Bar (pronounced K-Bar), which is a combat knife longer than the width of your neck, to the skin of a Marine Corporal he was holding in a headlock.

I knew this wasn't part of any real training that would make it out to the general force…because it was unsafe.

So, I started stressing and my body filled with anxiety until the demonstration was over; I told no-one in the office upon return…and then the article (Reference #16) turned out fine; it was very positive.

Jaffe's writing was the first time I read writing from a reporter where my eyes just flowed down through the paragraphs and columns…I would only experience this one more time in my career from a Marine Corps Combat Correspondent.[59]

[59] That Marine Mustang's name was Robert Wynkoop.

The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program wasn't all positive though.

We handled one incident in which a Marine 'choked out' his wife while watching the microwave clock because he knew from the Martial Arts Program training just how many minutes he needed to choke her until she was dead.

* * * * *

"Tone!" ...he said to me on the phone.

"Fuck off; get out of here with that shit...you're going to have to wait in line just like everybody else," I told him.

"Tone ...Tone ...Tone," (then) 'Marine Corps Times' reporter Gordon Lubold kept responding as he stayed on the phone.

I couldn't get rid of him...he just kept calling me and calling me, and while I may not have used the 'F' bombs, he and I both know whatever I was saying was along those lines.

I was stressed out!

It was during a period where I was in the media office/section all by myself for a couple of months and we just started using a program in Microsoft to log our incoming media queries...Gordon was sitting at #125 in the queue, but he wanted and needed some answers or numbers on personnel matters within the next 24 to 48 hours before his deadline.



This is a photo of (then) Marine Corps Times reporter Gordon Lubold at Kandahar airport, washing clothes, in January of 2002.

Eventually, O5MB got a call from Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs ordering him to order me to assist Mr. Lubold by his deadline as well as to accommodate his requests

in the future...it was the beginning of a great friendship. ☺

In retrospect, if I had been at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs and heard about someone denying 'Marine Corps Times' access...I would have injected myself to get them access as well because I learned over the course of my two decades in Public Affairs that Marines trust an outside organization with Veteran reporters more than they trust internal Marine Corps' forms of information.

The Marine Corps Times is part of the 'service times', i.e., Air Force Times, Army Times, Navy Times, etc. and then you have their 'mother' publication, 'Military Times'. All were owned at the time of writing this chapter by the Gannett Company (which also owns USA Today).

So, the 'service times' think they deserve special treatment...and it's not just regarding 'jumping the line' at times.

One time, a Marine Corps Public Affairs Officer tried to move the 'Marine Corps Times' publication away from the checkout line and place it with the other newspapers in the military exchanges (i.e., mini-marts, supermarkets on base) ...he ended up being personally attacked, and his career threatened as the 'Marine Corps Times' shouted 'First Amendment' violations (even though they were seeking to keep their preferential treatment at the checkout counters versus their competitors).

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I might have also gone through a period where I spoke in a British accent when reporters from Britain called with a query...and possibly in 'broken English' when I spoke with international journalists.

Then there was the time I showed up to work while sick with the flu and had to give a Public Affairs 'Period of Instruction' (POI) to a class of newly minted Marine Corps Lieutenants at The Basic School...and I was very 'low energy' and it was not my best moment.

This was during a time before COVID that even if you had a cold you pushed through it and went to work unless you were bedridden.

O5MB would receive a call from a full bird Colonel (that's a O6 in officer rank) from The Basic School a few days later calling for "Captain Upton's" immediate firing and possibly some brig time after he read the 'spear' evaluations completed by the Lieutenants regarding my class...but O5MB had my back and told the Colonel to 'calm down' and to wait for my next class.[60]

So, my next Public Affairs class at The Basic School was not only high energy...I handed out king size candy bars to this new generation of demanding Lieutenants for correct answers.

What bothered me most about the bad reviews for my The Basic School Period of Instruction is that along with losing my ability to relate to Enlisted Marines after becoming an officer...in just a few short years, I had lost my ability to relate to The Basic School Lieutenants as a Captain (after only a few years as a Captain).

Lastly, the media officer at Marine Corps Base Quantico also had double duty as the base's 'Community Relations' officer.

One time, in responding to a young man's letter, he was invited to the base and we visited places like the Marine Corps Sniper School and the President's Helicopter Squadron (HMX-1) ...I believe I was just as excited as the young man because it was the first time I'd been inside the infamous Marine Sniper school as well as the President's Helicopter Squadron.

[60] I will admit that even though I was sick with the flu, I wasn't nervous before I spoke before this class...it's like if I'm not nervous prior to speaking in front of others, it's not good.

Inside HMX-1 is a rare photo a young JFK Jr. (John F. Kennedy Jr.) ...he can be seen crawling around on-board the famous Presidential Helicopter.

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"Don't you roll your God Damn eyes at me," O5MB demanded as he pounded his desk with his fist from the seated position.

"Hey, listen, you tell me something, it takes me about 30 seconds to understand what you're saying...I could understand if I was making the same mistake twice, but I'm not, and I don't need to sit here on your couch for hours of counseling," I responded.

After that exchange it seemed like a true and honest discussion began between me and O5MB...and I never sat on his couch again.

You see, for whatever reason, O5MB had started pointing out every single little thing he thought I was doing wrong (like sending emails to senior officers that were too long and not succinct...which was true for the most part) and calling me into his office, telling me to sit on his couch...and then he would berate me for hours.

I don't know what was going on his life to make him feel the need to 'dump' on me daily his negative feelings...but for me, this got to the point where I made it known I was leaving the Marine Corps once my time requirement had been met in the next year.

What really was the final straw, even after I'd announced my departure was when I just started to 'tear up' while sitting there on his couch one day, but I was able to stop any of the 'water works' from flowing.

That night I went home and had a talk with myself...I wasn't going to take it anymore and the next day is when I rolled my eyes at him.

To me, this is a lesson in standing up to 'bullies'; but should a Marine attempt to do this to a senior officer, they need to

know they are not only putting their honorable discharge at risk…they could face time in the brig or other punitive actions per the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

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After Major Sgrignoli had transferred to the Commandant's office and 05MB had retired, a Major Timothy P. Keefe took over as Director of Quantico Marine Corps Base Public Affairs.

It was around this time; a newly minted Mustang Lieutenant was placed in the media section to work with me, and we began hearing about a 'sex scandal' at a Marine Corps Motor Transport school located aboard a U.S. Army Base in Missouri…the Army base was called Fort Leonard Wood.

While the Motor Transport school was located aboard an Army installation, it was a United States Marine Corps 'training command' and that fell under Marine Corps Base Quantico's area of responsibility regarding Public Affairs representation…and the U.S. Army wanted nothing to do with this mess.

When there was a 'hold-up' by Marine Corps' leadership to 'get out ahead' on a massive investigation underway at the school…myself and the Mustang Lieutenant wrote an official 'Memorandum' (respectfully) disagreeing with their approach.

But, when a media query was received by Fort Leonard Wood from National Public Radio (NPR), the Marine Corps was forced to respond…and Major Keefe gave the order for me to fly out to Missouri.[61]

[61] I would just like to inject at this point that I had never been to Missouri before, nor had I ever encountered a 'Popeyes' chicken fast food chain…which I spent my free time frequenting to purchase their spicey chicken strips with ranch dipping sauce and their mashed potatoes (with gravy) during my stay.

The next day after my arrival I escorted NPR (Reference #17) reporter Jackie Northam to the school site…she identified a female Marine she wanted to speak with and interview.

There were no pre-selected Marine females to be interview for this visit by NPR, nor was there any 'media prep' for the unit prior to NPR's arrival. It was important for me to convey on behalf of the Marine Corps that we were going to be as 'open' as possible to not only the investigation but to the media coverage as well.

As we started to walk off to the side for the interview, a Marine Staff Sergeant, one of the Instructors, tried to intervene…and he seemed to become incensed each time I denied his request to stop the interview.

The first time he told us we didn't have the authority to do the interview. I told him I had the authorization, and the interview was going to happen…all while the female Marine slated for the interview felt like she was in the middle of a 'tug of war'.

The second time he tried to intervene…I told him, "Hey, the Commandant knows I'm here and the Commanding General of this base knows I'm here; and both have given me the authority to escort reporters to come here and interview anyone they want."

The third time he tried to intervene I told him if he didn't stop what he was doing I was going to officially charge him with disobeying an order from an officer…and he finally walked away.[62]

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[62] About six months earlier, a Marine had died in an accident in which the Marine Corps was perceived as responsible/accountable. The incident garnered national media attention and the family was in 'middle-America'. Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs dispatched their top media officer to be with the family and help with 'damage control'. This media officer was highly regarded for his talents but in his efforts to protect the Marine Corps from bad publicity, said things to the family which didn't sit well with them regarding having respect for the value of human life and the loss the

Additionally, that day, I received a call from Quantico Public Affairs that the New York Times was interested in the story and would be arriving the next day...the reporters name was Jim Dao (Reference #18).

I picked up Mr. Dao at the main gate of the base to escort him aboard and as we were driving (a car I had rented) it became apparent that something in the trunk of my rental car was rattling around loose...and it was to the point where I had to pull the car over to 'round up' whatever was rolling around back there and secure it.

I guess Mr. Dao felt the need (or desire) to also get out of the car to see what was in the back of the truck...something I only began to worry about as I slowly opened the trunk to see what was going on.

The 'loose gear', if my memory serves me correctly, was some of my swimming gear...but Jim did see something in my large duffle bag that he asked about.

You see, while the Commandant of the Marine Corps has a reading list, it doesn't necessarily provide a list of books that would help a Public Affairs Officer expand their knowledge of their profession.

So, what Jim saw was a Compact Disc (CD) audio book I had purchased for the trip. It was written by former New York Times reporter and editor Max Frankel ...the book was titled, "The Times of My Life and My Life with the Times."

Turns out, Mr. Frankel was a mentor to Jim...I told him I had one of the discs in the vehicle's CD player.

The whole 'event' just seemed to get things off on the right foot for the media escort and I continued to interact with

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family was dealing with...so, the press officer was eventually banned by the parents from visiting their home and not long thereafter, recalled back to Headquarters. Bottom line, don't go into these type of situations thinking you have all the answers and you can't make mistakes.

Mr. Dao over the next decade or so for the rest of my military career.

As for the Investigation into the sexual harassment of female Marine 'students' by Marine Instructors...the Marine Corps' Criminal Investigation Division at Quantico launched a wide-ranging investigation that interviewed more than 400 current and former trainees and instructors. Eight Marine Instructors would eventually face charges of fraternization, sexual harassment, providing alcohol to trainees and assault. (Reference #19)

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With more than 100 media queries pending at any one time, I realized that if a reporter called me on a Monday with a Thursday deadline; and I gave them their answer within 24 hours...they would continually submit follow-up queries until Thursday to get as much information as they could prior to their publishing deadline.

So, in the future, if I had their answer within 24 hours, I would type out an email with their response and hit the send key...but it would be on a 'timer' that wouldn't launch the email until Thursday morning.

If the reporter sent a follow-up question or needed clarity on that Thursday and I could help them...I did.

Now, that approach is different than what 05MB described to me as the 'Slow-Roll' ...where you keep asking for more time from the media until they say that they are going to go ahead and publish their reporting.

This approach would be taken when a controversial query is received and the command (or Marine Corps Headquarters) needs more time to investigate the issue/matter internally, consult with the lawyers and leadership, and then draft (and redraft, and then redraft again) a response that may or may not include issuing a statement or offering up a leader to be interviewed.

* * * * *

I wouldn't refer to it as 'scuttlebutt' or rumors; it was more like a 'theme' while at The Basic School (TBS) infantry course when it came to being out in the 'field' with those Marine officers that had guaranteed contracts to be a pilot, or they already had their law degrees and were slated to become SJAs (again, Staff Judge Advocates in the military = Lawyers).

After an officer on a pilot contract knocked out another Marines tooth due to a lack of 'muzzle awareness' with his M16 rifle...this is when I first started to hear about this.

Then, when I finished all my officer training and graduated to the 'real' Marine Corps there was another theme I learned about...it was Naval Academy Grads; they were just different in management styles than the other Marine Corps officers that traveled different paths to become an officer of Marines.

While Major Sgrignoli, my first boss at Quantico was a stellar Naval Academy Grad who would go on to sing 'God Bless America' at the New York Stock Exchange when it re-opened after 9-11...Major Keefe, my current boss, was very open about being placed on academic probation while at the Naval Academy.

Keefe was more 'blue collar' and similar to not only my past, but he wasn't necessarily a straight lace company man...that's why I wondered why he 'worked' on me every day to stay in the Marine Corps as my departure from the military neared.

During this time in early 2001, the internet had entered the lives of Americans and the economy had taken off...a high percentage of Marine Corps Captains were 'jumping ship' for the private sector and bigger paychecks.

I had just completed a 'technical' degree in Computer Programming at a local college, but I didn't feel that I had a strong grasp of some of the more complex coding.

So, I was offered a teaching position at the 'Defense Information School' (DINFOS) where all military Public

Affairs personnel first train for their profession. I turned it down because I didn't feel I'd had enough Public Affairs experience to teach others at that time.

Then I accepted a post to be the director of our New York Public Affairs office where Major Sgrignoli had just completed a successful tour...I figured I would do 3 or so years there, make some contacts, and get a job in the city 'that never sleeps'.

But then, a Major at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs requested to 'bump me' from the post because he had marriage problems, and his wife and kids were in New York...they then made me an offer for me to work at the Pentagon in the Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs media section as one of four 'press/desk' officers.

I thought the job offer to work at the Pentagon, and basically in Washington DC were 'off the charts' due to my love of politics...and so, in May of 2001, I reported to the Pentagon for duty!

I have a coffee cup in my residence with the words, "Let's Roll" written across the American flag…I use it once a year on the anniversary of 9-11.

Todd Beamer said those words before he, and other passengers of flight 93, took down the last aircraft in the air that had been hijacked on Sept. 11, 2001.

The plane crashed in a field located in Somerset County, PA. There were no survivors.

Impact Statement – May 2020 [63]

[63] Impact statements are written essays by people with psychological disorders at the onset of treatment that describes the personal meaning of the traumatic event and how it has impacted their view of themselves, other people, and the world.

Controlled Chaos

The town I grew up in, San Miguel, is home to one of the 21 California missions built from 1769 to 1833 by the Spanish with the main goal of converting Native Americans into devoted Christians. (Reference #20)

My mother volunteered me to serve as an 'Alter Boy' beginning around the sixth grade and continued into early High School before I just stopped going due to the 'ribbing' I was receiving from my friends.

The thing about Mission San Miguel Arcángel, built in 1797, is that it had hidden passages and secret levers to open doors...so, I developed a desire to explore places.

Additionally, the small town of San Miguel had seen better days during WWII and Vietnam with a nearby military base, U.S. Army base Camp Roberts...but in the 1970s, it had several abandoned buildings, such as the USO, that my friends and I would enter (via various means) to explore and hangout.

So, after my arrival to the Pentagon in May of 2001, when I had lunch or coffee breaks, I would explore the Pentagon...both above ground and below.

I found that for about 90% of the Pentagon above ground, it conformed to the rules of geometry for a five-sided building with five floors and five rings (A, B, C, D, & E rings) that circle the interior of the building with ten corridors that take you from the 'A' ring to the 'E' ring on each level...the other 10% could have you running into a dead-end wall.

Veteran military reporter and author Steve Vogel wrote a book (Reference #21) in May of 2008 about the history of the Pentagon building...he writes about U.S. Army Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1946 getting lost above ground,

and Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney in 1989 getting lost in the basement.[64]

Now, the underground basement levels DO NOT apply the same simple rules of geometry as those above ground…it's a massive maze with no one handing out maps to tell you what's down there.

I once walked into what appeared to be a nice little movie theatre underground and when I saw a Marine Staff Sergeant walking my way, I immediately turned around only to find the door was locked from the inside *(the door handle was locked on the outside as well, the 'bolt' must not have 'latched' closed when last used)* …it was a Top Secret area and so I was questioned on how I gained access and then let out of the theatre via an authorized 'card key' swipe by the Staff Sergeant.

The coolest thing about the underground of the Pentagon is a little 'cook to order' café/kitchen that the 'locals' frequent (by 'locals', I mean civilians and military members that have worked in the building for decades) …the weirdest thing underground is the incredible amount of negative 'dense' energy you feel in some of the bathrooms down there.

After 9-11, my exploring stopped.

* * * * *

"What the FUCK are you doing???"

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh."[65]

"Recall that email immediately!!!"

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[64] I once saw retired Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Afred M. Gray lost on the second floor looking for the auditorium in the 'underground'…and so I took him there and it was not only an honor, but it was also an awesome conversation along the way.

[65] I think she was showing me her 'war face' over the telephone line (h/t Full Metal Jacket).

And I think before she hung up the phone…she might have even called me a 'little shit'.

That's how my day started one morning in the Pentagon just after I hit the send button on an email that is referred to as the 'Daily Media Report' (aka, the 'DMR').

The 'Daily Media Report' is a morning brief of media clips that have relevance to the Marine Corps. It gets sent out to all the Marine Corps' leadership around the world and some retirees.

That morning, I had arrived early enough that I thought I would utilize my new *(basic)* computer programming skills and embed photos into the email that accompanied some of the articles.

I was kind of proud of myself until I got the phone call from (then) Lieutenant Colonel Betsy Judge, who was serving as the Executive Assistant (aka, the 'EA') for Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs…which is actually the 'Deputy' position for the office.

Most general officers that are selected to oversee Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs do not have a 'Public Affairs' background…so, the Deputy is the subject matter expert that runs the daily operations (for the most part).

So the next thing that happened that morning is that Lieutenant Colonel Judge sent out an email to the entire 'Daily Media Report' distribution list advising them that this 'format' for the 'Daily Media Report' would not be replicated…because at the time, the hours of labor for every press officer to do this would have been excessive and the 'bandwidth' of data cell signals made downloading an email with multiple images very time consuming (it could take up to 10 to 20 minutes to download or your handheld 'blackberry' smartphone that was being issued

by the government during this time period would just crash).[66]

Everyone who received the 'Daily Media Report' that morning knew I'd tried something new and that I got my ass chewed for it...but what Lieutenant Colonel Judge didn't know, is that many Colonels were emailing me...all their comments were said with some humor in an effort to 'cheer me up', telling me that they liked it, to 'hang in there', and not to be afraid of making mistakes by way of 'taking the initiative'; i.e., to 'keep charging'.

* * * * *

While being a media officer at Marine Corps Base Quantico could be overwhelming at times, it was an island on its own...protected from the 'beltway' drama by just over 30 miles to the north.

One of the things I started to notice while at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs, is that no matter what plans we had in the morning...by around 9AM, those plans had been disregarded and we were oriented and focused on other issues or crisis.

I remember thinking to myself that while there was no predictability to the daily work schedule, i.e., chaos every day, running down and putting out fires...there was a calm control to how the new information was processed, prioritized, and inserted into our workflow.

I started referring to it as 'controlled chaos'.

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It seemed like it was a daily fight for the Marine Corps in defending the Marine V-22 tiltrotor aircraft (you know, the one that can take off like a helicopter and fly like a

[66] No '4G' at that time, no '5G' ...I'm not even sure we had a '1G' going on. Just bars on your cellphone that told you how strong your cell and data signal was.

plane) ...but the Marine Corps continued to believe in it and the impact it could bring to the battlefield.

Recent crashes over the past couple of years while the Marine V-22 continued being 'Tested and Evaluated' (i.e. T&E) only gave more support to its doubters in Congress and the media.[67]

Eventually the 'Testing and Evaluation' would be turned over to another U.S. military service, the Air Force, that would be purchasing several of the aircraft as well...they had more experience and knowledge in the testing and evaluation of developmental aircraft than the Marine Corps did.

Eventually, the Marine V-22 Ospreys would make it past the 'Testing and Evaluation' phase and onto the battlefield...and just like the Marine Corps told everybody, it was a game changer in war and in rescue operations.

Years later when a U.S. President would visit Iraq or Afghanistan and they needed to move around the battlefield quickly and efficiently...they flew in a Marine V-22.

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DATELINE: Headquarters Marine Corps, The Pentagon, Division of Public Affairs, Media Branch, Sept. 11, 2001

We were watching the news after the first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, had hit one of the twin towers, the North Tower, in New York at 8:46AM that day...and watched as a second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, impacted the other tower, the South Tower, at 9:03AM.

Shortly thereafter, we received an email from the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs of Staff Operations section (referred to as the 'J3') informing us that there was, "not a threat to the Washington D.C. area."

[67] This effort in Congress to kill the Marine V-22 was led by (then) Wyoming Congressman Dick Cheney.

The discussion at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs focused on trying to predict any media queries for the Marine Corps related to what we now considered terrorists attacks...for example, "Were there Marines, Marine Reservists, or former Marines onboard one of the aircraft or in the buildings?"

In the end, it did turn out that a retired U.S. Marine officer by the name of Michael Horrocks was the co-pilot of United Airlines flight 175 that struck the south tower of the World Trade Center that day.

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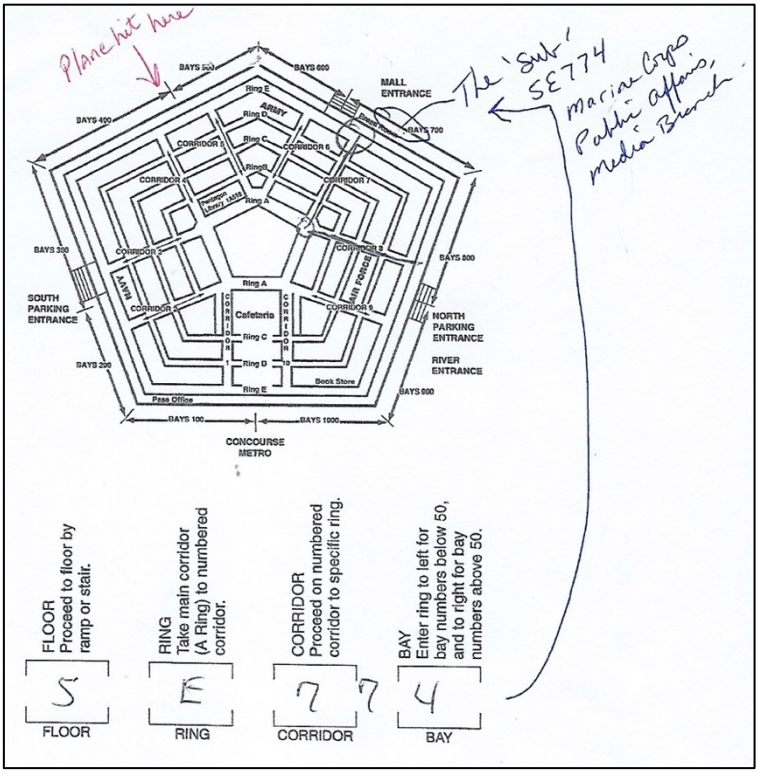
When you grow up in California in the 1970s and 80s you become somewhat unfazed by earthquakes unless they were above a 6.0 on the Richter scale...you even discuss with friends how you would have 'rated' the earthquake for your area.

So, when the plane, American Airlines Flight 77, hit the Pentagon at 9:37AM on Sept. 11, 2001, my first thought was not that the Pentagon had just been attacked by terrorists that had hijacked an aircraft...but I distinctly remember saying to myself, "That earthquake wasn't shit...probably a 4.4 on the Richter scale."

Then we heard the scream of a woman running down the corridor in front of our office and the Pentagon's blaring siren to evacuate the building...we looked around at each other in disbelief as we realized we just got hit...the Pentagon had been successfully attacked.

I picked up my backpack and opened the office door near the 7th corridor. Our office was located at 5E774 (Fifth floor, E [outside] Ring, between the 7th and 8th corridors).

I was immediately met by a Pentagon Police officer directing evacuees down the 7th corridor towards the center courtyard and preventing access down the E Ring hallway where the impact had taken place.



This is (or was) the typical card given to visitors to the Pentagon to help them find where they needed to get to. I have inserted the room number for Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs in September of 2001.

We were grouped together as we walked and were led by a Pentagon Police officer, who, before he could figure out where he was supposed to take us...walked us around in a square on the 2nd floor...going down the 1st corridor, heading up the outside E Ring, then heading down the 10th corridor and back towards the A Ring and the center courtyard before leading us out to the South Parking Lot of the Pentagon.

As we walked along the inside A Ring, a woman ahead of me fainted and was caught by the man next to her...and inside the center courtyard of the Pentagon, there was a Marine Lieutenant Colonel pacing back and forth talking on a satellite phone as smoke billowed from the damaged Pentagon behind him...it all seemed surreal.

On my way out of the Pentagon, there was (at the time) a row of 'Pay Phones'. I put a quarter in the machine and called reporter C. Mark Brinkley of Marine Corps Times.

> *"The smell of burning plastic permeated the halls and people were crying," said Marine Capt. Stewart Upton, a public affairs officer. "People were running through the corridors. Some were getting emotional. I heard people saying, 'I can't take this, I can't take this.'"*
>
> *– A Battered Fortress Stands, by Sean D. Naylor, Military Times Staff Writer, published Sept. 11, 2002*

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There were a couple thousand personnel from the Pentagon standing around in the South Parking Lot as United Airlines flight 93 was still in the air.

Many eyewitnesses in New York and around Washington DC on Sept. 11, 2001, will talk about how blue the sky was that morning...but after the attack on the Pentagon, the sky had filled with smoke and the smell of jet fuel mixed with burning plastic was prevalent in the air outside of the building.

Pentagon personnel in the South parking lot were talking about other planes that had been hijacked and possibly headed for the Washington DC area. Many questioned out loud if we should all just be standing around grouped together and so we began displacing.

Flight 93, the fourth and final aircraft hijacked on 9-11, was indeed still in the air and its intended target was apparently the U.S. Capital building...but during those precious minutes after the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon...nobody really knew.

It's possible, that if flight 93 arrived in the Washington DC area and had observed thousands of people standing in a

parking lot...that the flight could have changed its intended target.

That's why I believe that if Todd Beamer and the other brave passengers on flight 93 hadn't taken action to stop the terrorists...we all could have died that day in the south parking lot of the Pentagon.

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A fellow Marine Captain that I worked with at the Division of Public Affairs, Media Branch, was named Joe Kloppel. We had both exited the building together and were standing out in the South Parking lot.

After a while of standing around, I suggested we walk to my apartment a couple of blocks away in Crystal City to try and track personnel down and get accountability.

(I would, and still do regret that decision after learning about and hearing the heroic stories of those military personnel and civilians that worked at the Pentagon and stayed in the building searching for and saving people that were trapped or injured.)

We arrived at my studio apartment around 9:55AM and turned on the TV.

One of the last phone calls to make it into the Washington DC area before the cell phone system collapsed was one of my best friends (since age 3), Kelly, to check on me.

I remember talking to him on the phone as I watched the first tower of the New York Twin Towers, fall...then after hanging up and about 30 minutes later, I watched the second tower fall.

Eventually, I would be able to get ahold of and gain accountability via my apartment landline for a couple of Marines.

Joe and I would soon learn that a temporary headquarters had been set up for Headquarters Marine Corps at the Navy Annex.

The Navy Annex was located southwest of the Pentagon, just a short walk, and was comparatively smaller in size.[68]

We were ordered to stand-down and rest until 6PM when we would be reporting to the Navy Annex for the overnight shift...and so we did.

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That night at the Navy Annex I briefed media coverage as it related to the event and the Marine Corps...standing there briefing, I remember asking myself how I went from the small town I grew up in to arrive not only in Washington DC, but to briefing the leadership of the Marine Corps during such a historic time in our nation's history.

I really can't say or remember if I slept that night for very long; although Joe and I did take shifts monitoring media coverage and putting together the morning report that went out across the Marine Corps...I still remember hitting the send key on that morning's email.

When our shift was over, I went back to my apartment.

They were doing construction work on the roof of the apartment complex and I couldn't get any sleep before my next shift, so I relocated to another apartment in a different tower of the complex.

I was tired, exhausted, and after getting into my temporary apartment and turning on the TV, I became emotional.

Watching the images on the TV, I could feel the outpouring of love and support; not just from Americans...but from around the world.

The media coverage showed images of large memorials that were created outside U.S. Embassies, cloth flags colored in red, white, and blue hanging from overpasses

[68] The Navy Annex was demolished in 2013 primarily to make room for an expansion of Arlington National Cemetery.

across the country, and reporting on the loss of thousands of lives and missing family members.

Watching all this, my emotions bubbled up beyond the control of my physical body.

I lowered my head down in my hands and 'lost it', overwhelmed with emotion and tears running down my face.

* * * * *

Our office space in the Pentagon was lovingly referred to as the 'Sub' primarily because it had no windows...but also because the office was shaped like a rectangle with the long end running along the outermost 'Ring' of the building, the 'E Ring'.

The 'Sub' was sectioned off via doors into about 3 or 4 sections...for example, there was a Media section, Community Relations section, *(future)* Plans section, etc.

If the Taliban had really wanted to cripple the Pentagon and the leadership, they should have hit any other side of the building than where they hit, because no other section of the Pentagon had been part of the reconstruction and security improvements that were taking place at the time for the historic building. [69]

[69] By the way, it just so happens, the Pentagon began being built on Sept. 11, 1941.



Photo of the media section in 'the sub'that was located along the outside wall of the Pentagon in September of 2001. Pictured working behing his desk is (then) U.S. Marine Public Affairs Officer, Captain Dave Nevers.

You can say all you want about former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, but from what I know, he played a major part in the reconstruction and security improvements of the Pentagon...and just prior to Sept. 11, 2001, he was overseeing a project that was rebuilding the Pentagon basically brick by brick...making it stronger to save lives and putting in windows to help with folks' mental health that worked in the building.

It just so happened that on the day the plane struck the Pentagon, it hit the one...and only one...section of the Pentagon that had just been reconstructed...so the plane didn't make it to the center of the Pentagon...it made it through the outside 'E Ring' on impact before being stopped by the 'D Ring' ...bottom line, the reconstruction had saved lives.



Later, at the Pentagon, the third hijacked plane hit a wedge of the building that had been upgraded to the highest security standards—meaning it was both well protected and largely vacant. "It was truly a miracle that the plane hit the strongest part of the Pentagon," recalled one Army official, Philip Smith. "In any other wedge of the Pentagon, there would have been 5,000 people, and the plane would have flown right through the middle of the building."

– "On 9/11, Luck Meant Everything," By Garrett M. Graff, Director of Cyber Initiatives at the Aspen Institute. Published in 'The Atlantic', Sept. 10, 2019 (Reference #22).

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My Chiropractor was engaged to be married…his fiancé was in a car stuck in traffic just off to the side of the 'puzzle palace' (aka, the Pentagon) and she was an eyewitness to the planes path as it scraped the ground just before impacting the Pentagon…they never got married…she was just not the same after what she witnessed.

When we returned to the Pentagon on the morning of Sept. 13th, our roof was burned out. I was surprised (as well as

usually just bitchy) that we were let back into the building so quickly due to the obvious toxins we were breathing in.

I went to the 'head' (aka, the bathroom) on the corner of the 7th corridor and outside E Ring...and walked up next to another gentleman, a civilian bureaucrat, at the urinals (that were separated by a barrier).

I stated out loud that I thought it was bullshit that we were let back into our office with the air quality the way it was...and I added onto that – that whoever approved that decision was a fucking idiot...and that's when the gentlemen standing next to me informed me that the 'fucking idiot' was him.

The gentleman would go on to explain that there was pressure (from the 'higher-ups') to give the American public and the world the perception that the attack on the Pentagon really didn't impact our headquarters of National Defense like the destruction of the Twin Towers...the image we wanted to present to the world was, in the words of Monty Python and the Holy Grail, "It's just a flesh wound."

The offices for the Director and Executive Assistant of Marine Corps Public Affairs were located down the hall closer to the impact of the plane...the leaders were out of town for the annual Marine Corps' Public Affairs conference on 9-11. Their offices had to be temporarily relocated due to being completely burned out.

In the following years, there would be investigations of Marines in New York and at the Pentagon that proved their claims of being in the building that tragic day as false.

* * * * *

Since I lived just two blocks south of the Pentagon, I could jog to a nearby cement paved trail that ran from Crystal City, Virginia into Washington DC. The cement trail was used for walkers, joggers, and cyclists.

Along the way, you would pass by Reagan National Airport.

When I was attending Marine Corps enlisted bootcamp in San Diego back in 1993; recruits could hear and observe large jet airliners taking off from the San Diego airport every five minutes or so...and with every aircraft I would make a wish that soon I would be out of my current hellish environment and on one of those planes flying far, far away.

But in the days and weeks after 9-11, while jogging past Reagan National Airport, with every loud roar of an aircraft taking off or coming in for a landing; I found myself filled with anxiety and looking over my shoulder to make sure the flight path of the aircraft was safe and not heading for a large building in the nearby area.

* * * * *

We settled back into our office in the Pentagon doing the best we could to maintain operations as reconstruction began on the damaged wedge.

I know that I wasn't one of the top media officers from looking through past evaluations...but I was the only one of four media officers at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs that wasn't married.

So, the head of media operations for the Marine Corps, Major Pat Gibbons, told me to take a walk with him.

We walked down the outside E Ring, then up the 8th corridor, and then along the inside A Ring, and then headed back to our office down the 7th corridor.

I really had no idea what he wanted to talk to me about, but by the time the walk was over, he had offered me a chance to deploy to the country of Bahrain to work with the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet that oversaw operations for the Navy-Marine Corps team in the middle east.

On Oct. 12, 2001, I would find myself changing planes in Europe to catch my flight to Bahrain...and I would be one

of two Caucasian Americans (the other Caucasian was a Marine officer, a Major, from Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs that deployed with me). The flight was packed full of Muslims returning to their home in the Middle East.

So, not only did I not speak Arabic, but I also felt outnumbered and unsafe...like a fish out of water and wondering if I was in over my head.

"He's from Headquarters …here to help."

(then) Brig. Gen. James N. Mattis – Oct. 2001[70]

[70] It would be nice if this was a complementary comment from Mattis…but when he turned to (then) Col. Thomas D. Waldhauser, Commanding Officer of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit and said this, it was because I was asking to many questions at the pre-invasion brief for Afghanistan while aboard the USS Peleliu.

Lockdown Got Fired

Arriving in the country of Bahrain and navigating customs, getting a rental car, and getting to the hotel was made less stressful by way of the other Marine (Major) that deployed from Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs with me.

The reason we arrived in Bahrain, as I briefly mentioned at the end of the last chapter, was because the headquarters for the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) was located in its capital city, Manama.

The city of Manama seemed like a brand-new city back in 2001...with all its roads nicely paved, no gridlock, and its huge malls appearing to be newly built and uncrowded.

The next morning after our arrival, the Major and I would travel to the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command headquarters to check in with (then) U.S. Navy Commander Jeff Alderson, and his deputy, (then) U.S. Navy Lieutenant Melissa Scheurmann.

For the first couple of days, we appeared to settle into a routine of waking up and heading to the command, then returning to the hotel we were staying at where evening 'briefings' were held with a handful of international media that had descended upon Manama in the aftermath of 9-11 to cover America's response against al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Near the end of my first week, I would receive orders to escort media onto aircraft carriers that were operating in the Arabian Sea...the U.S. Navy was not only launching missiles from the Arabian Sea into Afghanistan, but attack aircraft, operating side-by-side with several U.S. Marine Corps Aviation Squadrons.

I would first arrive aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt on October 18th, then the USS Vinson on the 28th, the USS Peleliu on the 29th ...and I would continue to take media out to these ships until the U.S. Marines landed in Afghanistan on Nov. 25th.

I remember that first night on the USS Theodore Roosevelt and getting my best sleep in over a month and a half since 9-11 ...because I finally felt safe at sea aboard an American aircraft carrier; not my high-rise studio apartment in Crystal City (blocks from the Pentagon) and not in a hotel in the Middle East.

The coolest thing about these travels with the media was undoubtably getting 'sling-shot' off the deck of an aircraft carrier...the landings were just as cool of an experience, but a little more stressful because I knew how rare of a skill it is to land on a ship at sea while making sure to 'catch' an arresting wire system that brings the aircraft to a stop.

At night, I would venture up to the highest point I could get to aboard these carrier ships to not only observe aircraft landing and taking off, but to watch the groups of Navy personnel wearing different colored clothing, all working in unison, and most under the age of 21...never skipping a beat while maneuvering multi-million-dollar aircraft and deadly bombs atop a crowded flight deck.

* * * * *

After a couple of weeks in Bahrain, the Marine Major from Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs that traveled with me to the Middle East had to return home for personal reasons.

On my next phone call to 'check-in' with Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs, Executive Assistant Lieutenant Colonel Betsy Judge told me to go to the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command in the morning and find a Marine by the name of Brigadier General James Mattis.

It took me a while to find a string of brown tents aboard the U.S. military base, they were set up parallel to and

snuggled in between one of the exterior walls of the small base...they directed me to find Mattis in one of the nearby buildings.

I knocked on the door and (then) U.S. Marine 1st Lieutenant Warren C. Cook Jr., Mattis' military aide, opened the door...and then he let me in.

There were maps up on every wall and as Cook went to get Mattis, I started to 'take in' all I was looking at.

I had my back turned to Mattis as he approached and when I turned around, his first question to me is what my security clearance was.

Now, folks have written glowingly about Mattis' type of gentlemanly talk and poetic language while effortlessly inserting four letter words for 'emphasis' like it was a special talent...and it was in several ways.

Apparently, I was in an area that required a 'Top-Secret' level clearance and I told him I only had 'Secret' clearance at that time. Then, with his gentlemanly language mixed with a poetic tone...the next thing I know, I've been backed out of the office, and he is shutting the door, saying, "come back when you have the clearance."

So, I called the Pentagon to speak with Judge at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs and told her what I needed...and within a week, I had a temporary 'Top-Secret' clearance.

This began my service as the Public Affairs Officer for a unit being referred to as Task Force 58.

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I can't remember exactly how many days I was given notice to choose six members of the media to embed with Task Force 58...but it was around 72 hours.

Prior to this tasking, the media I'd been escorting back and forth to naval ships had been selected by Navy Central Command Public Affairs...but this was left for me to decide.

While not specified...the implication for this order, departure date, and secrecy was that we were going into Afghanistan.

I wanted reporters from both the major 'wire' services of the Associated Press and Reuters...and then I also needed a videographer and photographer (which gave me '4' seats filled up).

The Associated Press reporter in Manama was not of American or British nationality...so I made some phone calls, and within hours an American Associated Press reporter (and U.S. Army veteran) was on his way to the Middle East from Europe.

A reporter for Marine Corps Times, C. Mark Brinkley, had traveled to Bahrain from the Washington D.C. area. I had met him years prior when he worked for the Jacksonville Daily News covering Marine Corps Bases Camp Lejeune and New River...he was the one that wrote the McHoax article.

Here is the list of media chosen to embed:

1. Claudia Parsons (Reuters Reporter, British)
2. Douglas Mellgren (AP Reporter, American)
3. Iain Sullivan (AP Videographer, British)
4. Jim Hollander (Reuters Photographer, American)
5. C. Mark Brinkley (Military Times Reporter, American)
6. Jim Crawley (San Diego Union Tribune Reporter, American)

I could have chosen a reporter in Manama that worked for USA Today instead of C. Mark Brinkley, but I didn't feel the reporter was a 'good fit' for the group or embedding for a long period of time with a Marine command going to war...so, since Gannet (Publishing Company) owned both

USA Today and the Military Times publications, I made sure that Brinkley confirmed his reporting would appear in both publications.

Lastly, Crawley was a late scratch due to his health concerns.

* * * * *

I can't tell you why I developed an interest in media ground rules while going through the Public Affairs Defense Information School in early 1996...but I did.

I continued to study the media ground rules of all past major wars and conflicts that I could get my hands on for the next five years...up until the evening before Task Force 58, with media embeds, departed the Middle East for the Arabian Sea.

That evening, hours before our departure, I was tasked with writing the media ground rules...and I was ready.

I wrote a one-page document in about an hour that was later approved by the Navy Central Command lawyers and then signed by all the embedded media without changes.[71]

And I never had an interest in writing Media Ground Rules again...nor did I need to.

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The office for the senior Public Affairs advisor to the Secretary of Defense is titled the 'Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs' ...aka OSDPA.

The person holding that position at the time of 9-11 was a woman by the name of Victoria Clarke...and rumor had it that she had more influence with then Secretary of

[71] THE TIMES (of London) would later write a letter of appreciation to Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs describing the 'ground rules' as, "well in balancing the rights of Press freedom with the need for discretion in what is reported, to prevent danger to the lives of the military."

Defense Donald Rumsfeld than other senior Department of Defense policy appointees.

Not long after her arrival to the Pentagon and prior to 9-11, I would participate, along with other press officers from the other military services, in a 'practice' Pentagon Press Briefing for Clarke where we pretended to act like Pentagon Press reporters shouting questions...she seemed to be not only a good Public Affairs practitioner, but a quick learner of the military and the Pentagon.

From what I understood, Clarke's influence with Rumsfeld directly impacted (or resulted in) the directive to the Navy Central Command and Task Force 58' to not only embed media with the Marines going into Afghanistan...but for media to land within 24 hours of the first wave of Marines landing in southwestern Afghanistan at what would come to be known as 'Camp Rhino'.

* * * * *

Public Affairs Officer, Chris Hughes, then a Major in the Marine Corps, showed up in Manama to join Task Force 58 just about 24 hours before our departure. He was there to replace the Major from Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs that had arrived with me (but then had to return home for personal reasons).

Hughes was the director of Public Affairs for the Marine Corps Base in Hawaii and he deployed to the Middle East from there.

Hughes was a prior enlisted Marine and fellow Mustang Marine that I felt could have 'pulled rank' on me and 'bumped' me from the deployment...but he didn't and stayed back in Bahrain with other members of the Task Force providing support.

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In the beginning of a major exercise, war game, receipt of orders to attack, or in the immediate aftermath of an

attack…I would usually observe leaders staying awake for up to two and a half days.

Anything more than two and a half days the entire staff want the 'punch drunk' general to go to bed…and if his/her boss finds out about it, it's a derogatory reflection of that general's judgement to try and stay awake forever.

So, after about two and a half days after Task Force 58 received orders to land on a secret desert airstrip in southern Afghanistan, Mattis went to get some sleep.

During this time, Task Force 58, led by Mattis, was not only put in charge of the Naval ships at sea, but we also had U.S. Navy SEALs already in Afghanistan with eyes on our landing area…and we were coordinating refueling for our historic CH-53 Sea Stallion flights of over 500 miles from the Arabian Sea into southern Afghanistan.[72]

Some hours later after Mattis went to his 'quarters', as an overnight duty assistant for the Task Force, I was given an order by the head of operations, (then) Lieutenant Colonel John Carl, to go wake up the general because there were some decisions that needed to be made.

I found Mattis' living quarters, banged on the hatch…and nothing.

I went back and told Lieutenant Colonel Carl that Mattis didn't answer his door and I was sent back to bang louder this time…and nothing again.

What followed, after I returned the second time unsuccessfully is still amazing to me as Lieutenant Colonel Carl knew he had to make the decisions that couldn't wait.

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[72] I had never heard of a Marine being put in charge of U.S. Navy ships at sea…but Brigadier General Mattis was. I remember the first staff meeting after he was given this authority and the ship's Captains asked Mattis what they should do. He asked them what they were doing now, and they basically responded that the ships were spaced out and going in a circular motion. Mattis responded with, "Yeah, ok, keep doing that."

It was like he was conducting a symphony of answering phone calls, making phone calls, and giving orders to staff...Lieutenant Colonel Carl got shit done that night that needed to get done and he was a 'cool customer' while doing it.

It was a good lesson for me to observe about taking charge and making decisions when you need to.

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Providing false or misleading information to the media in order to manipulate the enemy is considered unethical and impacts the credibility of Public Affairs personnel during combat...it could also be illegal if done without the proper authority.

So, in the days prior to the Marine Corps arrival into Afghanistan, I was given the authority to allow media coverage of a 'wave' of CH-53s helicopters packed with combat loaded Marines taking off from the ship...but only on the condition that the helicopter's destination couldn't be revealed in the reporting.

The actual destination of the CH-53s were not even given to me and therefore not to the media...but the media coverage of this event inferred the helicopters were headed into Afghanistan. I would later learn they landed in Pakistan and then returned back to the ship.

This entire process seemed to provide us with intelligence from Afghanistan as to any plans Al-Qaeda or the Taliban had in response to a large military unit invasion...for example, this helped answer the question as to if the Taliban knew where we planned to land once they heard we were coming and what their planned actions could be.

I had heard that the authority for this 'event' came from the senior military commander in the Pentagon...the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then General Colin Powell.

* * * * *

On Nov. 25th, the first wave of U.S. Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit landed at a desert location in southern Afghanistan referred to as Camp Rhino...and that's when General Mattis gave me the order (aboard ship at sea) to go get the media.[73]

Mattis was going to announce to the world that the 'Marines have landed in Afghanistan' ...and for the record, I was very fucking excited running through the ship because I felt the news would not only be on the front pages of every newspaper around the world, but it would 'lift spirits' back home.[74]

You know, like in the 'Team America' movie... "America, Fuck Yeah!"

This is where my lack of public affairs experience began to show as I conducted no real preparation with General Mattis prior to his announcement of the invasion into Afghanistan with the media...nor did I prepare messaging and talking points that were staffed with the Pentagon, State Department and White House.



That's me, in-between General James N. Mattis and Reuters reporter Claudia Parsons. We were out at sea before our CH-53 Sea Stallion Helicopter flights into Afghanistan.

[73] The 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit followed immediately into Afghanistan and stayed with us at Camp Rhino and later Kandahar airport.

[74] You know, like in the 'Team America' movie ... "America, Fuck Yeah!"

The General had announced the Marines landing to the media as, "taking a piece of Afghanistan." ...which the press and foreign policy wonks labeled as inferring a permanent occupation of Afghanistan by the United States.

The next evening, the command group for the Marine Corps' Task Force 58 and the 15th MEU (along with the media) would land in the second wave into Camp Rhino via CH-53 helicopters...and we received intelligence that the Taliban were traveling to our location.

I received word that General Mattis wanted to see me.

When I arrived, the General was calling in an airstrike on the approaching Taliban convoy via a PRC-77 Portable (radio) transceiver while he was dictating a correction to me for the media...along with the message that, "We're about to get busy here."

The comments about 'taking a piece of Afghanistan' would be the subject of numerous critical after-action reports (aka Monday morning quarterbacking) back in Washington D.C. among the policy wonks and senior leadership attending military universities for months to come and I felt responsible.[75]

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DATELINE: Camp Rhino, Afghanistan

There was a friendly fire incident in Afghanistan on December 5, 2001, that killed 3 Americans and injured numerous Afghans fighting in alliance with the United States to overthrow Taliban rule of the country.

[75] The 'Taking a piece of Afghanistan' quote would have been a perfectly fine comment to make in the early days after 9-11; but about 40 days after that tragic day, State Department 'wonks' had taken over the messaging for the White House and the Pentagon regarding not giving the perception that America was now going to basically have a permanent U.S. territory in Central Asia.

Most of the injured Afghans were brought back to Camp Rhino for medical treatment and I was given the order to keep the media away from covering the injured Afghans...and that's what I did.

However, the reporting and media uprisings back at the Pentagon would classify my actions as, 'locking the media in a warehouse'[76]

[76] The nickname 'Lockdown' would be given to me after I returned from this deployment by Lieutenant Colonel Steven Kay when he served as the head of the Media Branch at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs in the Pentagon...and for the record, I didn't 'technically' lock the media in a warehouse. We were living and working out of that warehouse, and I simply told the media they couldn't cover the wounded's arrival and to stay in warehouse area.

Friendly fire kills 3 GIs

5 Afghans also die; bomb falls just 100 yards from troops

Thursday, December 06, 2001, By Carol Morello and Vernon Loeb, The Washington Post

At this Marine base, reporters and photographers were denied permission to watch or photograph the injured being transferred from helicopters to the base hospital or to C-130 airplanes.

Under military ground rules, reporters are not allowed to file stories that interfere with ongoing operations, but no ground rule prohibits reporting on casualties so long as it does not interfere with rescue efforts.

Marine spokesman Stewart Upton said the decision to prevent reporters from observing the casualties was made by Marine commanders at the air base here.

Upton later said that in the future, reporters will be allowed to observe the injured and wounded under certain guidelines, such as a prohibition on showing their faces.

(Reference #23)

This would lead to me being replaced as the senior Public Affairs Officer for Task Force 58 by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Tori Clark, after the editors for the major newspapers and TV networks demanded to meet with her at the Pentagon to complain.[77]

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[77] My brother would later contact me with the following message: "While they say everyone gets their 15 minutes of fame...nobody said it would be positive."

The desert airstrip at Camp Rhino was managed and maintained by a U.S. Air Force unit that did an incredible job of keeping aircraft coming and going.

However, there is a term in aviation referred to as a 'brownout' in which a pilot's visibility is restricted due to dust or sand in the air...and in the desert, this can cause a helicopter to crash upon take-off.

And on the evening of the casualty incident, due to a 'brownout', a Marine Corps helicopter would crash upon takeoff with no injuries to crew but the ammunition aboard the aircraft 'cooked' off rounds for the next hour or so near the outside perimeter of the base.

I walked into the headquarters and received the information from General Mattis and normally would have walked back to a computer, typed up a press release and either printed or emailed it back for approval.

But this time, I just took out my pencil and wrote out about three sentences and read it back to the general...he approved it on the spot along with allowing media access to the crash area (at a safe distance) while rounds were still going off.

There were other times where I would walk into Mattis' office to ask press questions about attacks on our perimeter in which we could hear mortar fire and he would say something like, "They're (i.e., the Taliban) probably just testing that side and will shortly attack on the other (side)." ...I wouldn't pass those comments along to the media; I would say something to the media like, "We are aware of the situation and monitoring it."

* * * * *

While I was replaced by Major Chris Hughes (coming in from Bahrain) ...Mattis didn't send me home and kept me at Camp Rhino.

I must admit that after the article ran and I was relieved of my position that I pointed out to Mattis that Washington

Post reporter Carol Morello wrote that we had tanks at Camp Rhino.

Since we didn't have tanks at Camp Rhino, I asked that she basically be 'voted off the island' ...but he refused.

Additionally, there wasn't much love among the Marines at the base for the media's desire to get access and cover the wounded...if it bleeds, it leads right?

On one of the days not long after the friendly fire incident described in the article, we would receive word that a Marine casualty was 'coming in' and due to the Washington Post article and the complaints to the Pentagon by the major news editors, we were given permission to inform the media they could 'cover' the arrival and transfer process.

In what may be hard to believe, Marines, under their own initiative, made a line on each side of the base's entry all the way to the entry of the medical unit (about half a block in distance); leaving just enough room for the medivac vehicle to drive through...the Marines did this with the intent to block media access and coverage.

As a senior officer to these Marines, I tried to get them to move and make access for the media...but you could tell they weren't moving.

Major Hughes has a photo, one of the few he would later hang in his office, of him sitting in the back of a truck off to the side; not just as an observer of this happening...but in amazement that it was happening.

I would eventually push my way through a couple of Marines with a photographer...but the rest of the media group kept back, sensing the moment.

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I pride myself on not making the same mistake twice and held subordinates to the same standard...but I might have blown up the Task Force 58 generator for the headquarters unit at Camp Rhino not once, but twice.

Okay, I did it; but both times it was attempting to power up the video equipment for the Associated Press videographer.

After the second time, while they were trying to see if they could get the generator to restart, the Executive Officer for the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) had me in his office area with my back up against the wall.

I thought he was going to kill me...I mean, I wish he would have along with the rest of the staff kicking me on the ground.

I wouldn't even have reported him...because I couldn't have felt worse for compromising our security; not once, but twice.

A couple of days later I would see the 26th MEU Executive Officer (XO) walking quickly towards me as I stood with media outside the area where we kept Taliban and Al-Qaeda Prisoners of War...the media were photographing and taking some video of the outside perimeter.

All I can remember is the first thought that went through my head as I saw him storming towards me, "Ah Fuck."

Apparently, POWs are protected by the Geneva Convention that mandates the humane treatment of Prisoners of War...including protection from 'public curiosity'. (Reference number #24)[78]

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"Who's going to explain this fuckup away...you Capt. Upton, from Headquarters Marine Corps?"[79]

That was (then) U.S. Marine Colonel Thomas D. Waldhauser, Commanding Officer of the 15th MEU,

[78] One thing everyone on the base knew was the order General Mattis gave to the guards of the 'detainee' camp before it was opened...that if anyone tried to escape, "Kill them."

[79] I may have used the "I'm from Headquarters Marine Corps" a little too much.

counseling me and his Public Affairs Officer (PAO) about secret information that was briefed in the morning SECRET briefing that somehow got reported to the media.

I hadn't attended the briefing, but I took the ass chewing along with his Public Affairs Officer because it was something that could have happened to any Public Affairs Officer.[80]

You see, every morning a Public Affairs Officer at Camp Rhino would rotate attending the classified morning briefing and then come back and hold a press 'gaggle' with the media.



That's me on the right in a military uniform briefing reporters at Camp Rhino in Afghanistan's South Western Province of 'Helmand'.

Legally, the only person with the authority to declassify classified documents and information was nowhere near Afghanistan...but every day we had to decide what could be shared with the media, and therefore the public, from those briefings.

Along those same lines, by not being able to share everything with the media...the media could be led to false conclusions.

After a month at Camp Rhino, we relocated to Kandahar airport and for some reason, the media was inferring in

[80] Eventually, later in my career as a Public Affairs Officer, I would not attend Secret briefings nor log into classified computer networks to avoid even the possibility of being accused of leaking information...because my job didn't include the release of classified information.

their reporting that the Marines were encircling this massive city...which led to a large amount of Taliban getting in their vehicles and 'leaving town'. Their vehicle convoy was noticed along a long strip of highway headed out of town, and it was not a good day for the Taliban!

* * * * *

"Take me to the FBI."

> *{I thought to myself, "What man???? Take you to the FBI??? ... Why did I let you see me this morning? I don't want the FBI to know my name; I don't even want them to know anything about me"}*[81]

That was a request from (then) CNN reporter Bill Hemmer...and I would escort him up to about 10 yards from the front door of the FBI office located at Kandahar airport and told him he was on his own.[82]

I fully expected the FBI agent that answered the door to tell Mr. Hemmer to go away and ask who brought him there...and therefore another 'ass chewing' for me, but they let him in.

At Camp Rhino, access to the internet was not only limited regarding 'computer time', but the bandwidth was equivalent to one or two bars of a cell phone data signal...nothing close to 1G, let alone 5G.

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[81] There were numerous U.S. government and Coalition representatives aboard our base...the FBI just happened to be one of them.

[82] Depending on where you are in the chain of command and who you are working for, you can be instructed that you don't have the authority to tell a reporter 'No' to a request...if you want or think you should deny a request, you must first brief and ask the Chief of Staff or the General. This is partially because the leadership doesn't want to have the first time they find out that their Public Affairs Officer denied the media answers (or access) regarding a controversial story (or event) is by way of reading it in the newspaper or watching the news.

So, I would manipulate my sleep pattern to stay up overnight to read emails and the news being reported by the embedded media.

One time, in the dead of night, a phone call came in from CBS radio for one of their reporters embedded with us by the name of Allen Pizzey…he got out of bed, walked over to the phone, said he was 'good to go' and for the next 30 seconds he delivered a perfect news report on what was going on in Afghanistan, then hung up, and went back to sleep.

An Associated Press Photographer that was also up that evening, looked over at me and said, "That's old school baby."

That AP photographer, Dave Martin, would also take a photo of me jumping over a bullet ridden wall in the first days at Camp Rhino that appeared on the front page of the San Luis Obispo California Telegram Tribune newspaper in my hometown.



Additionally, during this time, I would become an excellent chef with the Meals Ready to Eat (aka MREs) …you know, the kind of meals that last for 25 years. Most offices had boxes where Marines were throwing packages from these MREs they didn't want or need.

My favorite things to make would be 'rice and chicken' or spaghetti...and for both, I would add tabasco sauce and saltine crackers.

* * * * *

I believe I ran by Mattis at about 12 miles an hour wearing nothing but thermals as he stood in the middle of the night talking to someone in the large garden area of the Kandahar airport.

In the back of the garden area of the airport is where we had placed our latrines...and as I ran, I might have also had one hand behind me to symbolically suggest I was trying to plug my rear end.

You see, while MREs were edible, Marines at Kandahar were able to get connections outside of the airport to provide locally made bread. But while everyone seemed to enjoy the fresh alternative...it brought dysentery and I felt it 'coming on' fast that night just as I was getting into my sleeping bag.[83]

The next day, Mattis was with his aide Lieutenant Cook walking in front of the airport where some of the Public Affairs Officers were hanging out. Cook separated from Mattis to walk up to me...he said the general wanted to talk with me.

Like I've said before about Mattis' way with words...it took me a couple of minutes after he talked to me and walked off that he had counseled me on not having my weapon with me the night before as I ran past him.

I didn't have the heart to tell him that when Major Hughes arrived to replace me...I had to give him my weapon.

While we had two major Marine units on the ground in Afghanistan, they were deployed to Sea before 9-11 and didn't bring thousands of extra weapons for the influx of

[83] It was given the nickname, "Osama's Revenge."

personnel that would fly commercially into the warzone without weapons.

When I needed a weapon for traveling outside the base with media, I would borrow one from someone else.

* * * * *

"Sit the fuck down!"

That was what Mattis said to me when I was filling in for his aide, Lieutenant Cook, one morning because Cook was going to a 'rifle range' we had created aboard Kandahar airport...I had been getting up and down each time he walked from one room in his office into the room I was sitting in.

I will say that during the time of working with Mattis it was surreal...like being in a movie.

There were many times on ship, during the planning and then in Afghanistan, where some great photos could have been taken of him...but you just felt it wasn't right.

The sound of a camera shutter can be a distraction and bring ego into some situations...and I also felt that after I snapped a photo of Mattis in some of these meetings or situations, he could likely walk over, take my camera, and destroy it.

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Another part of my job responsibilities, now that Major Hughes was in charge of the Task Forces' Public Affairs, is that I would escort reporters back and forth into and out of the war zone.

The reason reporters needed an escort was not just because they were traveling aboard a military aircraft, but also because the flight times and destinations were not always correct...and you didn't have time in a combat zone

during the middle of the night on a remote desert airstrip, to board and ask destinations.[84]

So, we would board the aircraft quickly and if we didn't land back in Bahrain...we would try to arrange a flight to Bahrain as quickly as possible wherever we did land.

The other problem with boarding the wrong aircraft is that you could end up landing at secret U.S. military bases in Pakistan... and the second time it happened to me, not only were we stranded for two weeks, but I was also threatened with imprisonment by an Air Force Colonel for bringing the media with me.



Photo from the secret airbase in Pakistan. The caption on the sign reads, 'FREE THE JACOBABAD TWELVE'...and in the lower right-hand corner, it is signed, '14th Re-Write Battalion'.

The media I was in charge of felt so sorry for me they approached the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then U.S. Air Force General Richard Myers, when he was on a stopover to the base we were being held at...he seemed amused by the media's defense of me and appeared to have a great impromptu media engagement with the press in which he went on the record with his comments.

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[84] There was also a limit on the total number of media that could be at Camp Rhino (or Kandahar airport) at any one time...so when one group arrived, one had to leave.

Even though there were many 'trials and tribulations' in Afghanistan for me...the lack of city lights anywhere near our desert airbase made for the best sunrises and sunsets I've ever experienced; and at night it seemed like you could see every star in the sky.

* * * * *

It was zero dark thirty at Kandahar airport in January of 2002 and I was getting my gear ready to take another group of media out of the war zone...and as I was talking to Major Hughes, I noticed over his left shoulder a member of the media walking out to the flight line.

The reporter, who I likened to the cartoon character 'Mr. Magoo', was elderly with eyesight and hearing problems...he was headed directly into the jet exhaust of an Air Force C-17 aircraft warming up on the flight line.

Since the reporter was my responsibility, I excused myself from the conversation with Hughes and calmly walked away...walking faster until I was at a full sprint to catch the reporter.

Thankfully, he made it past the first exhaust engine unharmed, and I caught up to him before he walked past the second one.

U.S. Air Force C-17s were (and still are at this time) an aircraft with such power, it doesn't take much runway to get off the ground and once airborne, can thrust itself, almost like a Rocketship, straight up into the air...and I loved that feeling when leaving a war zone.

After that, I got the group of media together, traveled with them back to Bahrain, and then I was on my way back to Washington D.C. and the Pentagon.

“Guess who's back, back again,

Shady's back, tell a friend”

‘Without me’ -- Eminem

Selling Out For Iraq

I could find my way to the office on one day only to run into a 'dead end' taking that same route the next day...it was like a scene out of the movie 'Animal House' when a marching band is lead down a street and become 'bunch-upped' when they come to the end of a 'dead end' street.

This was the Pentagon in January of 2002 as a major reconstruction from the 9-11 attack was taking place...and the contractors were focused, working 24/7, on completing their work by the first anniversary (which they did).

Included as part of the reconstruction was the relocation of Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs from the fifth floor outermost 'E' ring to the fourth floor just steps from the inside 'A' ring.

Before the reconstruction, the only windows at the Pentagon were on the walkway around the inside 'A' Ring with a view of the interior park and hotdog stand ...and very dark green windows that supposedly blocked listening devices, for high-ranking military and civilian officials located on the exterior 'E' ring with views of either a parking lot or the Washington monument.[85]

After the reconstruction, there were windows everywhere, bringing sunlight into almost every office space...and 'food courts' could easily be found on the second floor.

* * * * *

[85] This hotdog stand was rumored to have the 'most dangerous hotdogs in the world' because during the cold war, the Russians via satellite surveillance noticed the hotdog stand at the center of the Pentagon had a large number of personnel entering and exiting and therefore assumed it was a strategic location to point one of their nuclear warheads at in the event war broke out between our two nations.

Overall, I returned feeling unsuccessful, criticized, and firmly believing my career in the Marine Corps was over.

I also felt abandoned while deployed by the director of Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs at the Pentagon...so much so, I wanted to kick his ass and he could 'feel it' when we were alone in close contact.

Anyway, moving on...traditionally, there are four 'Press Officers' assigned to the 'Media Branch' of Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs, they are almost always all Captains in rank, in addition to the leader of the Media Branch, who is either a Major or Lieutenant Colonel in rank.

Accounts, like 'Aviation', 'Installation and Logistics', 'Plans, Policy, and Operations', C4 (cyber), etc. were divided among the four press officers.

So, after settling back into my workspace, I was given the 9-11 reconstruction account for the Pentagon...I would be the Public Affairs liaison for the Marine Corps to the contractors that were rebuilding the destroyed wedge and offices.

This was primarily because I think my fellow press officers found out the account needed to be assigned and while I was on my way back, convinced the Branch director to give it to me because I had the account for the legal 'Counsel to the Commandant'.

The reason why the Commandant's legal counsel was important to the first anniversary of 9-11 at the Pentagon was because a photo had been taken and circulated around the country of an undisturbed Marine Corps flag, surrounded by destruction, still standing in what had been their office.

Mr. Peter Murphy held that office at that time with Mr. Robert Hogue as his deputy. Both were in the office at the time of the attack and at the time of writing this, Mr. Hogue now holds that office.



* * * * *

As the first anniversary of the attacks of 9-11 approached and as I sat in meetings and conducting briefings to my leadership, I was invited into the General's office (for Marine Corps Public Affairs) to watch a video with my fellow press officers.

The video was of a television commercial set to air. I do not remember who the advertiser was that sponsored and made the commercial...I think it might have been for the credit card 'American Express'.

The video begins by showing a mother and her daughter carrying on throughout the day in New York City; walking around town, shopping, etc., before coming home and setting the table for dinner.

As the commercial and dramatic soundtrack continued to playout, the mother and daughter set three dinner places at the table.

What becomes obvious in the last moments of the video was that nobody showed up to sit at the third 'place setting' to eat dinner with them...and that this symbolic gesture was something that took place daily in their household.

It was a message to share with the world how hundreds, if not thousands of families in the wake of 9-11, even after a

year, still didn't know the fate of their loved ones as the rubble from the Twin Towers was still being sifted through to identify those who perished that day...the message delivered was that the mother and daughter had still not given up hope that their husband and father was alive and would one day be reunited with them.

As I stood in the office viewing the commercial, I began to sense I was becoming overwhelmed with emotion and fought to keep back the tears from running down my face.

I returned to my cubicle like an athlete that had come off the field (or tennis/basketball court) being unhappy with their performance; and I was certainly unhappy with my performance over the past year.

I was unhappy with not only the narrative of America being helpless as the terrorists surprised us on 9-11, but with my performance on that day while people died trapped in the Pentagon...and my performance on the deployment in which I was publicly fired...and since I wasn't Superman, I couldn't travel back in time to fix it all.

So, just as some immature athletes start throwing and breaking shit when things don't go their way...I started kicking the shit out of my office desk on Sept. 10, 2002.

I remember everyone in the office stopped to observe, kind of tilt their head questioning what was behind this disturbance, and then they went back to work.

This would turn out to be the first of six anniversaries (2002, '06, '07, '08, '09, and 2011) I would spend supporting public affairs activities on the anniversary of 9-11 at the Pentagon.

I would coordinate and escort media, develop talking points, etc. for the Department of Defense and the Marine Corps on those six anniversaries.

In late 2002, the anniversary began being pitched and used as justification for war with Iraq...not for our continued military presence in Afghanistan.

* * * * *

I would continue to have a verbal or violent outburst every year just before the 9-11 anniversary or on the day of.

Most military personnel bury events and experiences that involve death deep down inside for contemplation back home after they leave military service.

I don't believe my annual blowups would have ever begun and/or continued while still serving in the military if there wasn't the annual media coverage romanticizing the events of Sept. 11, 2001...as well as my required physical presence at a number of those media events inside the Pentagon on that day.

For example, a reporter for Fox News, Rick Leventhal, covered 9-11 in New York right outside the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center as the events unfolded that day in 2001, and not long thereafter deployed to Afghanistan to cover the Marines, and that's where I met him.

In 2019, I was watching him reporting on the anniversary from downtown New York on Sept. 10th, and I could see his emotion was overwhelming him and his eyes watering. The next day, the actual anniversary of the attack, he was reporting from Florida.

For the last couple of years since leaving the workforce, I've limited my access to viewing media coverage of the 9-11 anniversary as it approaches, and I don't answer calls on Sept. 11th unless it's from my kids. I try also to limit my contact with others by staying inside my apartment unless it's to go sit and sleep all day watching and listening to waves on the beach.

I would eventually realize that my physical and/or verbal outbursts would begin culminating about three to four days out from the anniversary; as I would selectively hear and see reports of others being taken advantage of in a hopeless and/or defenseless way; be it via robbery or someone buying a house only to show up with their moving trucks to find a 'squatter' with no law enforcement

authority willing to take action, etc. ...and I would hold onto these thoughts, ruminate on these, and if in the days just prior to the anniversary or on the day of, someone did something to me that made me feel defenseless and without any way to control what was happening to me, I would 'strike out' as my way, in someway, to confirm to myself that somehow, I had control over my life and the world I was living in.

But I still wake up every morning on the anniversary and I get angry enough to want to get on a plane to Afghanistan (or I guess Pakistan) and go kill everyone involved ...I even wish some of the dead terrorists like Osama bin Laden could be revived just for me to kill him again with my own two hands.

* * * * *

U.S. Marine Major Rick Long had taken over for Major Gibbons as the head of Marine Corps media operations after I returned from Afghanistan...and as he walked by my desk in the Pentagon, he threw a very thick environmental report that landed with a thud right in front of me.

"Look through that and see if there are any 'good news stories," Long said as he kept walking.

As the account holder for the Marine Corps 'Installation & Logistics', any environmental issues were my responsibility with the media.

As I read the report, I didn't find any 'good news' stories, but I did find such facts and figures as only 1,500 yards (about 6%) of the Marine Corps total 17 miles of shoreline were free from environmental restrictions at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps base located in Southern California (between Los Angeles and San Diego along the coast).

The Marine Corps is expeditionary by nature so-to-speak (from the sea to shore) ...and so not having shoreline and beaches to practice invasions significantly reduced a

country's military readiness to carry out its national interests around the world.

I had served an internship with the President of the California Sierra Club while attending California State University Hayward (he was also my 'Environmental Law' professor) in the winter of 1992 and I was also very familiar with the impact of California's environmental laws before joining the Marine Corps as my father tried to stay afloat running a Gas Station…so, I felt I could pitch a narrative from the report that there was an 'overreach' by the environmental groups making military bases more like 'nature preserves' vice training grounds for Marines.[86]

The next thing I did was give a call to a reporter I had met in Afghanistan, a Los Angeles Times reporter by the name of Tony Perry, and then sent him a copy of the report…he agreed that there was a story there regarding the contrast of environmental policy versus national security, but also because Los Angeles was just a few miles up the road from Camp Pendleton (i.e., there was a 'local' pitch to the story).

Before the article (Reference #25) was published in April of 2002, there was apparently a heated exchange that took place between the Los Angeles Times military beat reporter, Tony Perry, and the Los Angeles Times' environmental beat reporter on the press room floor with the editor caught in-between…the environmental beat reporter wanted the story killed.

Once the article ran, and in the words of today's generation, it went 'viral' as numerous other military beat reporters from not only national media outlets, but the newspapers that were published near military bases throughout the country joined the coverage and localized it to what they perceived as environmental

[86] California State University Hayward is now called 'California State University, East Bay'…probably because it is located across the bay from San Francisco.

overreach…and I felt like I was on my way to getting 'dealt back in' the Marine Corps Public Affairs field.

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Marine Corps Times reporter Gordon Lubold also returned home from Afghanistan after staying with us at Kandahar airport…only to be thrown out of the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps' office.

Not sure if it was Lubold's line of questioning or his reporting.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps at the time was General James L. Jones…and Jones had the Sergeant Major apologize.

After that, Lubold's relationship with the Sergeant Major was 'good-to-go'.

Also, what you have to understand, is that during this time in society in the early 2000's, it was not like it is today as I write this in 2022 regarding social media, blogs, and the internet.

While General officers in the military had more training and experience with the media as they rose through the ranks…that was not the same for Enlisted Non-Commissioned Officers as they rose through the ranks.

So, it was not uncommon back then for Senior Enlisted Marines to treat media in negative ways when they didn't like their line of questioning.

What I tried to express to future Sergeant Majors of the Marine Corps is that it's better to keep the Marine Corps Times close because they can be your best friend or your worst enemy regarding getting your messages out to the Fleet Marine Force (i.e., the entirety of the Marine Corps).

* * * * *

There is a very large underground that exists below Crystal City that includes grocery stores, restaurants,

jewelry stores, etc. ...and a metro stop that would take you directly to the Pentagon with another underground stop.

Getting up early and working late in an office with no windows, I could go an entire week without seeing the sun...but that 'direct' underground stop changed after 9-11 and you were forced to 'surface' from the underground area to go through security when entering the Pentagon.

Another thing about the Pentagon is that you could turn around in line for coffee and see a four-star general...and one time I turned around and it was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then U.S. Air Force General Richard Myers.

Most folks don't know that it is considered unethical for military leaders to have subordinate aides do menial tasks...so, at the Pentagon it was not unusual to see generals picking up their own dry cleaning.

* * * * *

On the morning of Sept. 8, 2002, the New York Times reported, from an anonymous administration official, that the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, has repeatedly tried to acquire aluminum tubes "specially designed" to enrich uranium to build a nuclear bomb. (Reference #26)

That same Sunday morning, there was a 'full court press' by the President George W. Bush Administration to 'echo' this information (from an anonymous source) ...including the Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney, appearing on the NBC Sunday morning talk show, 'Meet The Press'.

Cheney said, "There's a story in The New York Times this morning...and I want to attribute 'The Times'. I don't want to talk about, obviously, specific intelligence sources, but it's now public..." (Reference #27)

So, an 'Administration' source associated with the President of the United States leaks information to the New York Times anonymously...then, while the

Administration puts the attribution and responsibility for the information on 'The New York Times'; they echo the message to the American public as rationale and support for going to war with Iraq.

When the media asked the Administration if Iraq has WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction), they can't say for sure, but then point to the New York Times reporting ...then you ask the New York Times for their proof that Iraq has WMD...they tell you to go ask the Administration. Nice little loop![87]

* * * * *

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WELCOME TO THE JOURNALIST COMBAT TRAINING PROGRAM!

"FOR THE NEXT WEEK I'M GOING TO BE TEACHING YOU FOLKS HOW TO SURVIVE UNDER BATTLEFIELD CONDITIONS...

"...IF FOR NO OTHER REASON, SO OUR TROOPS AREN'T PUT AT RISK BABYSITTING YOU! NOW, LET ME MAKE ONE POINT **VERY** CLEAR FROM THE OUTSET...

"I AM NOT, REPEAT **NOT**, HAPPY TO BE HERE!" (Reference #28)

[87] Another dis-honorable manipulation of the New York Times was by the Hillary Clinton campaign during the 2016 election against Donald Trump. A lawyer for the Clinton campaign went to the FBI telling them of ties by the Trump Campaign with Russia...and that the New York Times was about to report on it. But the New York Times didn't know about these so-called 'ties' by the Trump Campaign with Russia until the Clinton lawyer, after meeting with the FBI, informed the New York Times of not just the possible 'ties' between Trump and Russia, but that the FBI was investigating it (because he told the FBI about it). Another nice little loop that wasted years investigating and millions of taxpayer dollars that found no such 'ties' existed. During an election year, in the month of October, just before the voting month of November, this is referred to as an 'October Drop' (aka #OctoDrop).

That was a quote from 'Doonesbury', a political comic strip by American cartoonist Garry Trudeau ...and it was a 'strip' read daily (and on Sundays) across the country.

This comic strip about a military/media bootcamp came about in November of 2002 after the Bush Administration, on the path to war with Iraq, authorized the Pentagon to create a 'bootcamp' of sorts for members of the national media ...the rational was to get the media 'in shape' for war.

And, if you remember from the last chapter from when I first arrived in Bahrain and checked into the U.S. Navy's Central Command, I met Navy Public Affairs Officer Lieutenant Melissa Scheurmann.

So, when 'Mel' (as she was known) was transferred to the Pentagon and put in charge of the Navy's portion of the bootcamp, she recommended me to partner with her and lead the Marine Corps portion. (Reference #29)

My role was not as much of a 'Drill Instructor' role as it was managing about half a platoon of national media together with Mel...but there was a leadership relationship I felt to the group along with feeling responsible for them."

The morning of the culminating five-mile 'tactical road march' that took place aboard Marine Corps Base Quantico, I was ordered by the head Public Affairs officer at Quantico to meet with their team (to coordinate coverage of the end of the bootcamp) at the same time the 'march' was to take place...and



Associated Press / Steve Helber

Journalists near the end of a five-mile hike during the final day of a media boot camp, a Pentagon-sponsored training exercise at Quantico Marine Base in Virginia.

That's me on the right, in the middle, taking reporters on a Hike. (Photo courtesy of the Associated Press)

I was not leaving my platoon.

Before the 'march' was over, the Quantico Public Affairs Officer had contacted my boss at the Pentagon (that would be Lieutenant Colonel Steven Kay now) and told him he was going to 'write me up' for disobeying an order...which was later forgotten when the Quantico Public Affairs Officer observed me help a reporter that had gotten hurt on the hike during a bomb drill and didn't think he could finish.[88]

* * * * *

QUESTION: "Is there anything else you want me to know?"

ANSWER: "Yes, just don't lock reporters up in a warehouse!"

That was the conversation that took place between the Assistant Secretary for Defense for Public Affairs, Victoria Clark, and (then) U.S. Navy CAPTAIN Frank Thorp...who was selected to head up the 'media' section for a massive press operations center to be built from scratch in Doha, Qatar.[89]

Since the decision to go to war with Iraq was already made in late 2002, I'd caught wind of a 'team' they were putting together of Public Affairs Officers to support not only the press 'Mecca' they were building in Doha, but the 'ground' and 'aviation' commands of U.S. Central Command (forward).[90]

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[88] Can we just acknowledge that this is another point in my career where I 'put it all on the line'?

[89] A couple of years after 9-11, the Captain I worked with at Camp Lejeune, Captain Player, was now Major Player and was serving as the military aide-de-camp for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Victoria Clark. I got him to ask Clark to endorse one of the annual Pentagon reports on relations with the media...and she wrote a very nice endorsement asking me if I 'really did lock the journalists up in a warehouse'.

[90] While the real U.S. Central Command exists in Florida, when deployed under that command, they create like a 'mini-me' of that command and its subordinate commands...labeling them as (forward).

I remember going in and telling my boss, Lieutenant Colonel Kay, that he needed to send me because I was the only unmarried Marine in the section...and he bought it even though none of the other Marines in my section had deployed yet to war.[91]

So, I was sent to Tampa, Florida, home of U.S. Central Command, to join the rest of the group of selected Public Affairs Officers for pre-training before deployment...I was pre-assigned to the media section of the Doha 'Mecca' and to work directly for CAPTAIN Thorp.

I arrived in Tampa somewhat depressed because the night before I had watched the Super Bowl and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers had defeated my team, THE RAIDERS!!!! Oh, yeah ...um defeated soundly 48-21 ...I hadn't realized there would be thousands of happy fans arriving at the airport, returning home, from attending the Super Bowl out west in San Diego.

That night the Marine Public Affairs Officers went out to dinner and apparently two 'Buccaneers' stars, John Lynch and Ronde' Barber were in the restaurant...I refused to leave the table to go meet them, but I heard they were awesome and gracious of their time to my fellow Marines.

Sons-of-Bitches even shut down U.S. Central Command for the day not long after I arrived for a city parade to celebrate the Super Bowl victory...and it went right by the hotel I was staying at.

* * * * *

"Does anyone in here know who 'Steve Inskeep' is?" CAPTAIN Thorp shouted to the press room we had just 'stood-up' in Doha...and one of the media officers raised their hand and said they did.

[91] Both heads of the U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters Media section that sent me to war rated me the lowest of all four press officers.

You see, I had been placed in charge of 'booking' and 'assigning' offices to the media in the very large warehouse we had taken over aboard Camp As Sayliyah in Qatar.

Inskeep, calling on behalf of National Public Radio (aka NPR), was very 'late to the party' so-to-speak and I kept telling him that I had assigned all the spaces to the news organizations like AP, Reuters, NBC, FOX, BBC, etc. that had not waited until the last minute to call.

I mean, only the whole world has known for weeks, possibly months that we were going to war with Iraq and building a media operations center in the desert...but somehow Inskeep was the only one of a major news organization that came 'late to the party'.

The conversations got so heated that Inskeep complained to CAPTAIN Thorp and that's when someone else was assigned to provide better customer service to NPR...and they also got a room.

* * * * *

"How do you pronounce it, 'Ka-Tar' or 'Cutter'? I've heard it pronounced both ways." ...that would be the first question most radio hosts would ask regarding the country we were calling from, Qatar.

The next assignment given to me was to set up and establish connections with radio stations throughout America.

My first experience with talk radio was listening to Rush Limbaugh with my Dad while working at the Gas Station he owned.

While attending college in the Bay Area in the early 1990s, working on my degree in Political Science and the Government, I listened to the talk radio station, KGO 810 AM, every day...mostly during the overnight due to my school and work schedules.

The first time I called into a radio station would be while at college, to KGO, to speak with a broadcaster by the name

of Ray Taliaferro ...he 'ate my lunch' because I didn't know all the facts of what I wanted to call in and talk about. There might have even been dead airtime after he asked me his last question and I was just thinking about how to answer it.

So, while I knew I needed to be very well prepared before I spoke with radio stations, I needed to build a list of the major radio stations for every state first...and I also went around and asked everyone for their local hometown stations.

Everyone being able to call into their hometown radio stations with friends and family 'listening in' turned out to be a big hit for morale...and I was kept very busy.

I would eventually graduate to providing on camera briefings to the media in Qatar just like I'd done in Afghanistan after morning briefings...I would be staring at the Secret and Unclassified computers right before I walked out...with only my judgement and talking points to not give out classified or tactical information.

* * * * *

I can't remember how I was left alone in the office and without 'adult supervision', but I was when the call came in about two European journalists that were arrested outside the base and were being held at a police station.

I didn't ask for permission and since I felt responsible for the journalists in Doha...I took the keys to a van and left the base with minimal driving instructions on where the police station was located.[92]

I also felt that this matter needed to be resolved immediately, because in my short experience of journalists getting arrested...once it gets reported on by the media, diplomats of both countries get involved and patriotism from both sides can complicate things.

[92] Remember, this is before GPS and iPhones with map services.

As I was driving in my military uniform (which you were not supposed to wear off the base) ...I realized to myself that if this didn't work out, I was in deep shit.

So, when I found the police station, that was the first victory...it was a large mud hut with open windows guarded by two armed officers.

When the two journalists first saw me in the police station, the expressions on their face were as if I was rescuing Prisoners of War...they were very gracious and apologetic for not following the rules Qatar had given journalists to stay in the city of Doha.

I didn't walk into the police station like John Wayne or any type of authority figure other than the uniform and the shiny rank on my collar I was wearing...and after my very sincere apology, they released the journalists into my care.

WhoooooooooWeeeeeee

* * * * *

"Hey, stop harassing me and leave me the fuck alone."

Yup, that's what I said to a bipolar U.S. Marine Corps Major and yes, I was back in trouble again...because he wanted to write me up for talking to him that way.

The Major didn't even work in the media section, and he was not in my direct chain of command, so I didn't know why he was telling me what to do every day...and leaving notes on my bed at night.[93]

I was ordered by CAPTAIN Thorp to make a full and heartfelt apology to the Major.

The only thing I could think of in a way of how to provide a heartfelt apology (that I didn't really mean) ...was to basically reenact the 'Dog Killer' scene from the National Lampoon's Vacation movie.

[93] Where we slept was like an open squad bay...or an open warehouse.

This is the part where the main actor, Clark Griswold, played by Chevy Chase, gets pulled over on the highway by a Police Officer and must not only explain how he forgot their dog was still tied to their station wagon's bumper when he got on the highway...he must apologize to the Policeman.

I carried it out all the way up to the watering eyes and the stare out into the countryside...or desert in Doha.

* * * * *

On the last day of March 2003, Fox News Channel war correspondent Geraldo Rivera was embedded with the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division...and he was accused of giving away their location in Iraq during a LIVE broadcast.

It was assumed in the media section that Mr. Rivera was being removed from the war zone because of his reporting that could have possibly violated the media ground rules or because he simply had become a security risk.

But then something started to happen...family members from the 101st started voicing their opinions and most, if not all, coming via their spouses.

They objected vigorously to Geraldo's removal from the unit because he was their lifeline back home. Spouses got to see their other spouses when he was reporting, and kids got to see their deployed parent.

So, Geraldo was not 'voted off the island' so-to-speak.

* * * * *

There was a documentary crew allowed to be on the base and filming throughout our time in Doha at the 'Press Center'.



One of the Marines from the Press Office, U.S. Marine Captain Josh Rushing became the focus of the documentary.

He was ordered by the Marine Corps not to attend the movie premier...but he did anyway.

He was subsequently discharged from the Marine Corps and began reporting for the TV network 'Al Jazeera English'.

The name of the documentary was called, "Control Room" ...I have a brief cameo.

* * * * *

In the first days of April 2003, about two weeks into the second Persian Gulf War, senior spokesperson, U.S. Army Brigadier General Vincent Brooks entered the briefing room in Doha and made the following statement:

> "Ladies and gentlemen, I have a short statement to make, and I will not be taking any questions. Coalition forces have conducted a successful rescue mission of a U.S. Army prisoner of war held captive

in Iraq. The soldier has been returned to a coalition-controlled area. More details will be released as soon as possible. Thank you very much."

General Brooks was referring to the rescue of U.S. Army Private First-Class Jessica Lynch, she had spent more than a week as a prisoner of war in Iraq after her convoy got lost and then ambushed by Iraqi forces near the town of Nasiriya.

Up to about three days before this rescue mission took place, U.S. and Coalition forces had been 'bogged down' and delayed in advancing due to a severe desert dust storm...but now with this news breaking, it seemed like it gave a 'shot in the arm' to our advancement and the race to Bagdad for the U.S. Army (that was advancing from the west) and the U.S. Marines (advancing from the east) was on!



This is me and U.S. Army General Vincent Brooks in Doha, Qatar. He was walking around the offices to thank us for our work because that's just the type of leader he was. My Mother sent me a packet of news clippings for the General from the Sacramento, California area where she lived because General Brooks graduated High School there.

* * * * *

In late April, as operations and manning started to shut down in Doha, I was asked if I wanted to 'move forward' into Iraq and I said, "Yes."

Shortly thereafter, I was informed I would be on loan to the U.S. State Department (for a couple of months) by way of an agreement between the head of U.S. Central Command and the State Department.

I was told I would not be wearing my military uniform, but the typical civilian attire worn by U.S. State Department officials.

Then, on May 1st of 2003, President Bush announced an end to 'major' combat operations and that 'rebuilding' in Iraq would begin...but that the transition from 'dictator' to 'democracy' would take time.

That's where The Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (aka ORHA) comes in to serve as the 'provisional' government of Iraq...and it would be led by retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner.

The country of Iraq would be divided in four parts by ORHA: North, South, Central, and 'South Central' ...I would become the 'Director of Information' for South Central and based in the Iraqi city of Al Hillah near the ruins of Babylon.

I arrived in Bagdad under the cover of darkness on May 7th and while major combat operations had ended...gunfire and exploding bombs were going off all over the city throughout the night.

The ORHA South Central headquarters would be in a hotel that had no running water, no air conditioning, or working toilets...it was called the Babylon hotel.

The 'I Marine Expeditionary Force Forward' (aka I MEF FWD) had also set up near and inside of the area referred to as Babylon...they even gave tours of the area that included the famous 'Lion of Babylon'.

I MEF FWD had a 'Civil Affairs' unit made up of three U.S. Marines whose mission it was to work closely with the civilian population and authorities...and whenever I needed to travel to Baghdad or around southern Iraq, they traveled with me to fulfill the security requirements for travel of four personnel and two vehicles.



Photo of the Civil Affairs Marine Unit that worked with me in 2003, standing in front of the 'Lion of Babylon', Hillah, Iraq in .

* * * * *

"They're starting to plant bombs in the road..."

I overheard a Soldier saying the above quote to another Soldier in a 'chow hall' in Baghdad in early June of 2003...not long after ORHA and retired Lieutenant General Garner had been replaced by the 'Coalition Provisional Authority' (aka CPA) led by American diplomat Paul Bremer.[94]

[94] As retired Lieutenant General Garner was departing Iraq, he stayed in Al Hillah for a week with us because he was good friends with the retired U.S. Army Brigadier General, Roger 'Buck' Walters, who oversaw what was now being called CPA South-Central. During one of the private meetings between us three, Garner made the comment

Bremer's first actions were to issue orders disbanding the Iraqi military and everyone associated with the political party, the Ba'ath party, of their former dictator Saddam Hussein.

The problem was, everyone who worked for the government had to be a member of the Ba'ath party and the former Iraqi military, now without a monthly paycheck or retirement check, began forming the basis of a resistance.



The Commander of the CPA 'South Central', retired U.S. Army Brigadier General, Roger 'Buck' Walters (pictured left) informing Iraqi community leaders in one of the towns we visited about renouncing their allegiance to the Ba'ath party in Iraq. (One time, before security could get out of the SUV's, Buck Walters exited the vehicle and an Iraqi teenager approached him with a machete…Buck took the machete out of his hands and continued with the day.)



An Iraqi newspaper printing press.

I would travel daily for about an hour east, or west, or to the north for visits to Baghdad from Al Hillah on empty and wide open perfectly paved interstates (for the most part) …I would go and find 'printing' places or locations

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that "Marine Public Affairs Officers are the best in the military services…everybody knows that," he said.

where there was a printing press making newspapers and logging them in.

I would also visit with religious leaders and after being invited, attend what I would refer to as 'church services.



Some of the Iraqi cities we would visit in the 'Heartland' where Marines were in charge, i.e., the commanding officer, more likely a 'Major' in rank or above, would serve as the 'Mayor' ...one large city, a Marine Corporal oversaw not only garbage collection, but the electrical grid...and he was doing a better job than some of the 'city managers' in America.[95]

Driving in Baghdad just after the cessation of major combat operations, in many parts, you couldn't tell that there had just been a war...I could drive up in busy traffic, park, go into a store and buy some film and then go next door to buy me an ice cream.

Back in Al Hillah where we were based, when you walked the streets, you smelled chicken being cooked on rotisseries out in front of stores...one time I found myself surrounded by Iraqis and I got mad at myself for letting that happen and putting others at risk.

[95] In another major city we visited where the 'Mayor' was a U.S. Marine Major ...he talked about walking the streets by himself in both the day and night.

I even towed a huge mobile radio station from Baghdad to Al Hillah one time with an SUV[96] ...but the resistance was building and a few months after my departure from Iraq, my replacement would be killed returning from one of these types of trips. (Reference #30)

* * * * *

If I had the authority to award the 'Medal of Honor' to (then) Lieutenant General James T. Conway I would have for his actions during a Tribal Chiefs meeting among local

Shiite leaders...because when they brought the goat's head out and offered him the eyeball to eat, he ate it.



That is (then) Lieutenant General James T. Conway in the middle of the photo with his hands behind his back.

For Conway not to eat the goat's eyeball among these 30 or so Tribal Chiefs would have been disrespectful and possibly perceived as cowardly...but for me, sitting halfway down a large rectangle shaped room in-between 'Chiefs' ...I explained to them the concept of being a 'vegetarian'. That didn't seem to be a problem as one of them made a motion of their hand over the dead goat's

[96] On this day, it was 125 degrees in Iraq...it was the only time I'd ever observed Marines hiding under buildings or small coverings to hide from the heat during the middle of the day.

head popping out the eyeball through the goat's mouth and eagerly ate it like a hard-boiled egg.

Conway was the commander of I MEF FWD and all U.S. Marines in the area...I was there with my boss.

Overall, it was a great meeting...but the route taken there was one that made us vulnerable to ambush or attack.

There was obviously a lot of trust between the 'Chiefs' and the Coalition that went into us coming to this meeting...but I still think about the feeling I had on the road heading to this event and cringe.

* * * * *

I would try to sleep only to find a pool of my own sweat under my makeshift pillow...I had a balcony but there was gunfire around our location throughout the night. They said it was a local gun dealer.[97]

In addition to studying the media of Iraq's heartland...I would help driving security for the boss and that included visiting the 'mass grave sites' that were discovered of Iraqis that had opposed the regime about a decade or so prior to the 2003 invasion.

We would also travel around telling Iraqi's they had to sign a piece of paper disavowing the "Ba'ath" party...so it wasn't a surprise when our security, Nepalese Gurkhas, for the Babylon hotel we were staying at found rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) being 'stagged' under a nearby bridge. The RPGs were being prepared to fire at the hotel either that night or were awaiting the accumulation of more RPGs before they attacked.

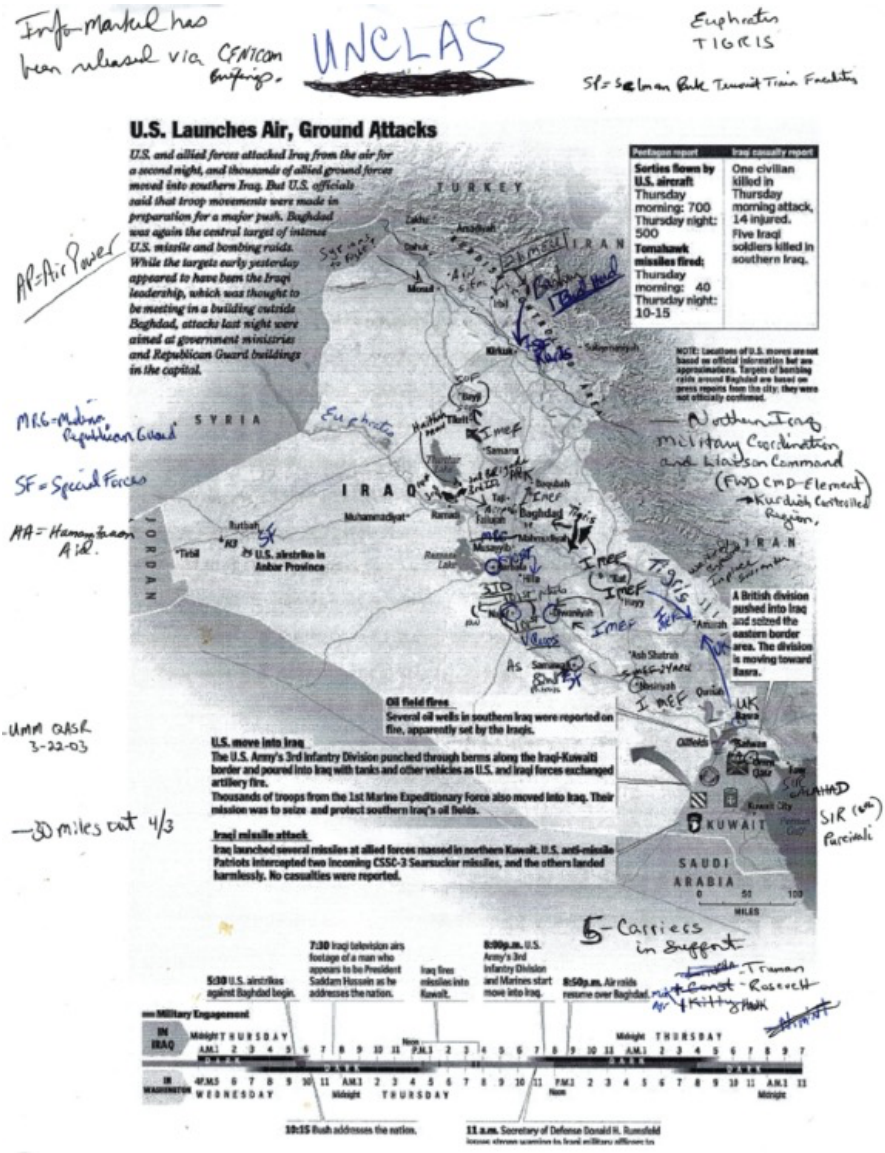
Since the Ba'ath Party members had all been fired, a woman with a PhD in Biology, previously a college professor, was cleaning the Babylon hotel...and after she

[97] It was during these nights that I started to realize there are 'levels' in this life you can experience...living in the United States was a certain kind of 'level' and being in a war zone was on a 'level' that I can best express by referring to it as being in 'hell'.

taught me how to clean and care for plants, my plants started living past a couple of days!

Then, after a couple of months of working for the U.S. State Department, the head of U.S. Central Command, U.S. Army General Tommy Franks, pulled back the military personnel he had 'loaned' to them, and I was headed home.

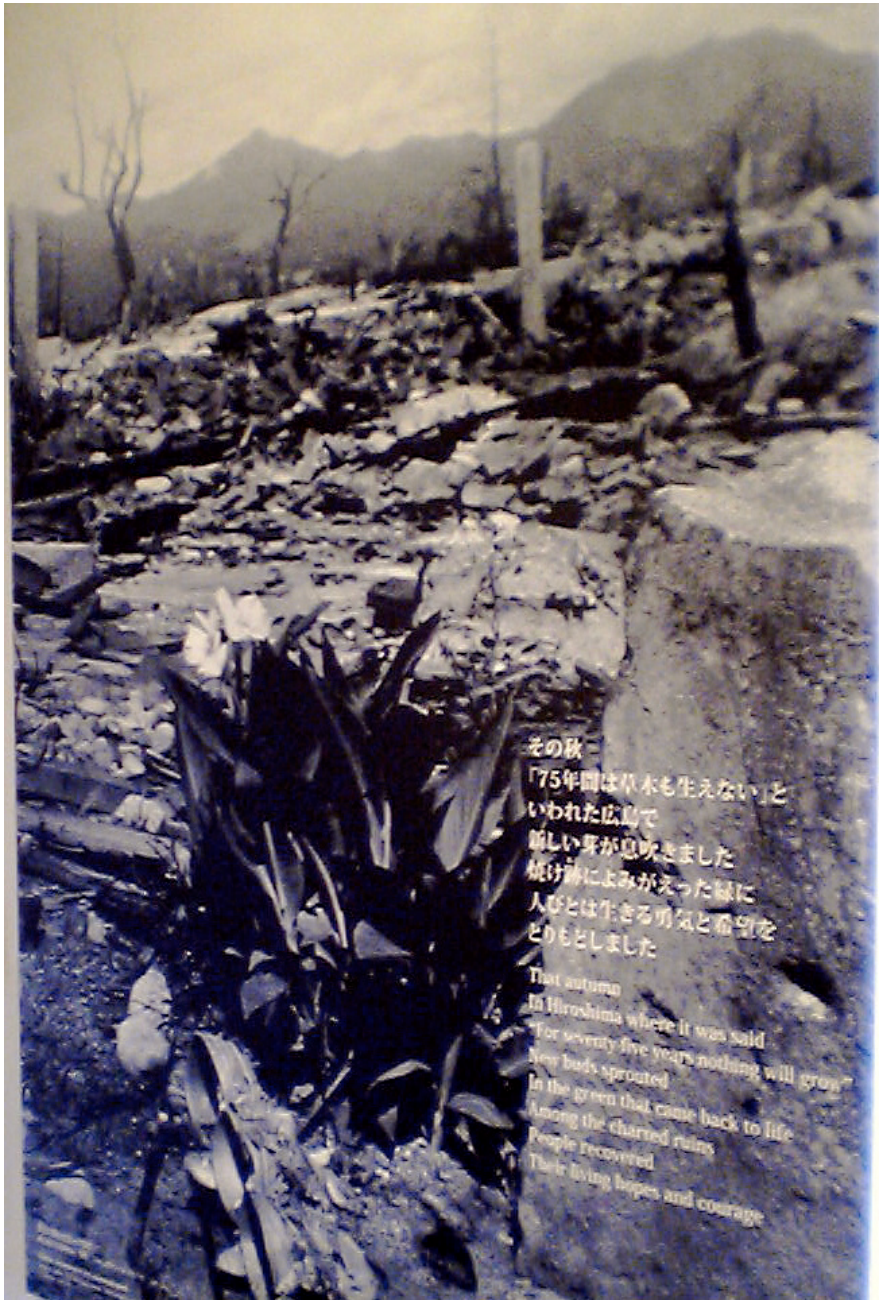
This would be the first, but not the last time I would get on the plane to go home from a deployment and tell myself I needed to get a tattoo on my forehead to remind myself that I didn't want to deploy again...because of the mental toll it was taking on me...dealing with assholes and the smell of feces and urine.



This is a map of Iraq that I used to keep track of the invasion in March and April of 2003.

That autumn
In Hiroshima where it was said,
“For seventy-five years nothing will grow”
New buds sprouted
In the green that came back to life
Among the charred ruins
People recovered
Their living hopes and courage.

Text that accompanied the photo of ‘Miracle Canna’ – Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (a museum dedicated to documenting the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in World War II)


その秋
「75年間は草木も生えない」と
いわれた広島で
新しい芽が息吹きました
焼け跡によみがえった緑に
人びとは生きる勇気と希望を
どりもとしました
That autumn
In Hiroshima where it was said
"For seventy five years nothing will grow"
New buds sprouted
In the green that came back to life
Among the charred ruins
People recovered
Their living hopes and courage

HIROSHIMA'S FLOWER BLOOMED

The major operational commands of the Marine Corps is broken down in thirds...one on the coast of southern California, another on the coast of North Carolina, and the third is located on the island of Okinawa, southwest of 'mainland' Japan. [98]

The Marine Corps' presence in Japan is not limited to the island of Okinawa...there is an aviation base located in the city of Iwakuni on the 'mainland'.

I had 'checked the box' in North Carolina, Quantico, the Pentagon, and now I wanted to see and experience Japan...so when called upon as I rose in rank, I would be able to answer questions about the U.S. Marine Corps presence in Japan.

There was an opening for the Director of Public Affairs at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan where the I Marine Air Wing (pronounced, 1st MAW) is the primary operational command there.

I would be the director of a 'consolidated' Public Affairs shop with Public Affairs personnel assigned to the 'base' and 'operational' commands working out of my office, not in the offices of the aviation squadron(s) they were assigned to.

This was the same type of consolidated Public Affairs office that I experienced at Camp Lejeune and while at New River Air Station...it is the best explanation for how the Marine Corps mentors and develops not just Marine Corps Public Affairs Officers, but Enlisted Combat Correspondents.

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[98] 'Operationally' means bases with units that train and deploy for combat.

“What the Hells wrong with you?” ...my new Commanding Officer, Colonel David T. Darrah asked me in front of all the new ‘check-ins’ that had just stepped off the plane from the United States and ‘mustered’ in an air-conditioned auditorium.

You see, in Qatar, while picking up a local journalist at the entrance to the base, to escort them in...it was the first time I’d ever seen someone in weather hotter than 100 degrees wearing a jacket.

Apparently, the weather in the Middle East had dropped recently from 115-120ish degrees to just over 100...and that gave locals the ‘chills’.

So, after recently serving five months in the Middle East, I was wearing a sweat top in weather that was 80 degrees and getting used to being in air-conditioned buildings...so, I felt ‘chills’ without additional clothing and it seemed odd to others and my new Commanding Officer.

The good news is that unlike my arrival at Marine Corps Air Station New River (McHoax chapter) ...I was given a fair shot to prove my competency and leadership by Colonel Darrah...and that’s all anyone can ask for.

* * * * *

(The following paragraph was spoken in Japanese; aka ‘Nihongo’)

“I would like to introduce you to Captain Stewart T. Upton, the new Public Affairs Officer,” the deputy of the Public Affairs office announced to the regional media in attendance as I sat behind a table full of microphones.

The position of ‘Director’ of Public Affairs at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni also included being the ‘Community Relations/Political Officer’ ...two jobs that are not normally placed into one ‘billet’.



米軍岩国航空基地の報道部長に
着任したアップトン大尉

I learned early that the 'Community Relations/Political Officer' job meant that every time there was a problem in the community with Marines getting drunk or 'noise complaints' from aircraft...I would be summoned by either local Japanese defense authorities or the local Mayor.



会談を前に、村安部長に頭を下げる
アップトン部長（左）

Sometimes there would be no media coverage of these visits where I expressed 'deep regret' for what happened...and other meetings the media would be waiting outside like Paparazzi, or they would already be in the meeting room as I entered.

I wish I could say this only happened once every year ...but it happened about every two months...for the next three years I was based in Japan.

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One of the female Japanese women that worked in the Public Affairs office abruptly stood up and looked me in the eye from outside my office.

She then proceeded in an expedited manner to walk into my office.

"No Captain Upton, you don't talk like that," she said as she shook her head and wagged her finger at me.

I hadn't said a bad word or a derogatory remark...what I had been doing is learning Japanese from watching movies I was familiar with so I could copy tone and dialect...and the night before I had been watching the movie 'The Last Samurai" that featured actor Tom Cruise.

What I had done wrong was the tone I used...and in Japan, learning to read and write Nihongo is about half the battle...the other half is learning how to speak the language among certain groups of social classes.[99]

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Not far from the front gate of Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, the Japanese Defense Facility Administration Bureau (DFAB) regional liaison department for Japan's Ministry of Defense was located...and they were the primary contact for the air station.

[99] I would also drive south and west on weekends to put myself alone with the local populous in order to force me to speak Japanese.

Their higher command was located in Hiroshima and managed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum that was connected to their office spaces.

After a year or so in Iwakuni and dealing with noise complaints coming from the Hiroshima office, I asked my senior Political advisor and deputy, Sorikisan, why we don't make a visit to the Defense Facility Administration Bureau in Hiroshima?

Her answer was that nobody has done any formal meetings between the air station and Hiroshima since the war.

So, we made an appointment and went on a listening tour to try and better understand why some of the noise complaints were 'valid' and some were made in which we had no aircraft in the area. We would also ask what we could do better to work together so the local population wasn't upset with the American military because of the noise complaints.

When I was on my first visit is when they gave me a tour of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and that's when I observed the photo of 'Miracle Canna'.[100]

Next, since we would have Marines get in trouble in the great nightlife of the city of Hiroshima and because I'd met the mayor of Iwakuni when I arrived along with the mayor of 'Yu' Town located to the south…I asked to meet with the Mayor of Hiroshima, and we developed a great relationship.

After I made the initial introductions in Hiroshima, our recently arrived new Commanding Officer, Colonel Michael A. Dyer, also met with the Mayor of Hiroshima and

[100] One thing I came away with from my time in Japan is that the citizens (including their military and elected leaders) of that great country have no 'taste' or desire for war. The impact and ripple effects of the two nuclear bombs and the loss of the war was the cause in my opinion. The Japanese don't refer to their military in a generic way…they refer to them as a 'Self-Defense Force'.

then we coordinated a meeting with the governor of Hiroshima Prefecture.[101]

At the end of my time in Japan, the Mayor of Hiroshima would present me with a photocopy of a picture he had on the wall in his office...referred to as the '14 Samurai'.

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"Marines were floating up the river north of Hiroshima and pointed a weapon at a local fisherman."

That was the report I received in the summer of 2004 on a weekend ...and so, I consulted with Sorikisan, my deputy, and we decided to take-off to the area and meet with the fisherman.

After we had gone up the river and met with the fisherman, there were media on the shore upon our return...and so, I issued an initial statement saying we were looking into this complaint.

After I returned to the air station, I confirmed that we had no Marines or other military personnel in the area for training and issued another statement...the story was dead for the most part.

But explaining to the new Commanding Officer, Colonel Dyer, that I didn't brief him prior to launching up to Hiroshima or immediately after was a problem.

They say that once you become a general officer that you will never hear the truth again because everyone doesn't want to upset you and kiss your ass...I guess the same could be said for Marine Colonels in charge of their own military base.

The other thing about Dyer was that he was very good at breaking you down until you gave it to him straight...and the bottom line was, he was new and the person he would have consulted with was my deputy Sorikisan...so, I didn't

[101] Prefecture is like a 'state' in the U.S.

want to waste time and get slowed down having to explain from zero to 100.

Eventually, he got it out of me...and everything was good-to-go after that.



U.S. Marine Colonel Michael A. Dyer (pictured left) at a news conference during a joint exercise conducted with the Japanese Self Defense forces aboard Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan. This was the first time I was able to have a professional background for the press conferences created by our Combat Camera department/unit. (Note: After Colonel Dyer retired, he worked at the Pentagon and attended my promotion ceremony to Lieutenant Colonel.)

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Every year, until the Coronavirus (COVID-19) that is, Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni would have an 'open house' and 'air show' ...it was referred to as 'Friendship Day'.

In 2005, we had done all the security planning and even 'booked' Japan's equivalent to our U.S. Navy's Blue Angels flight demonstration team for an incredible show.

Local citizens and their families filled the air station on that day to walk through and sit in some of the static

aircraft displays...and then lay down a blanket for a picnic while observing the air show.

Everything was going great until a Japanese helicopter pilot flew his aircraft too close to the crowd and lifted the front of the aircraft like a horse rising on its back hind feet...it sent high powered winds through the crowd.

In front of the crowd were VIP tents that lifted up from the ground and were then torn apart, sending the medal polls that had been holding the tents up through the crowd...numerous visitors were injured; including a young child hit in the head by one of the polls.

With all the regional media 'on site' to watch the air show...they all witnessed the incident.

So, I gathered them all up and walked over to an area nearby with some grass and took a knee while they all stood over me and asked questions...I just wanted to communicate to them nonverbally that I wasn't in a defensive mode, and I stayed there until everyone was done asking questions.



That's me, at the front of the photo,second from right, talking with the 'Operations' officer after the helicopter incident that ended the airshow.

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As part of any new commanding officer arrival...there is the 'meet & greet' press conference that will take place.

For Colonel Dyer, this took place around 2:30 pm on Friday, Aug. 13, 2004, in the Public Affairs office conference room...and everybody, both press and Colonel Dyer, were happy and excited for this event.

But, about five minutes into the press conference, news broke of a U.S. Marine Corps CH-53D Sea Stallion helicopter that made an emergency landing near the grounds of the nearby Okinawa International University...during which, the CH-53 clipped a university building adjacent to the crash site.

The aircraft then caught fire...but prior to exploding, Marines from the nearby air station, Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, who witnessed the crash landing, scaled two fences to get to the crash site and pulled the three crew members away from the wreckage just before the aircraft burst into flames.

Other Marines would arrive on site and enter the university building that had been clipped to assist with evacuating people from the building. (Reference #31)

After being informed of this incident by the reporter's phones 'lighting up', Dyer exited the press conference.[102]

What seemed like months later, all local and regional Japanese defense and elected officials arrived at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni for a brief by Dyer on the results of an investigation into the crash.

While the accident happened on the Japanese island of Okinawa and we were located on the 'mainland' ...the aviation unit that the aircraft belonged to was under the command of the 1st Marine Aviation Wing, which is again, located aboard Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.

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[102] While Dyer was authorized in his command position to comment, in Japan, prior to commenting on such a volatile and sensitive issue, you must consult with numerous senior military commanders and the U.S. State Department via the U.S. Embassy located in Tokyo, Japan.

Dyer wasn't the Commanding Officer of the 1st Marine Air Wing; he was the Commanding Officer of the air station...but because the local populous feared the same thing could happened in the Iwakuni area and because Dyer already had relationships with the local and regional leaders, he was asked by higher command to give this brief.

What I remember from the brief was that it evolved into a semantical and comical 'lost in translation' event...where the Japanese officials were requesting a 'triple check' on the mechanical cause of the incident versus Dyer trying to explain that we just needed to confirm the 'double check' took place that failed to happen during repairs to the aircraft.

Overall, what was clear from the investigation was that the enlisted aviation mechanics were being pushed to their physical and mental limits on a daily basis working on Marine aircraft for over 16 hours a day and somedays even longer on helicopters that are decades old.

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There was a trend in my family among the boys...that you could choose a car from our 'broken down' vehicle lot and rebuild the engine and undercarriage from scratch.

My oldest brother Russ rebuilt a Lincoln Continental with suicide doors...painted it all black, tinted the windows and had a license plate made that read 'DETHRYD'. The people in our small town and local communities didn't find his license plate amusing and actually complained to my parents about it.

My older brother Tom rebuilt a Chevy Truck with a 3-speed shifter on the side of the steering wheel...the truck was referred to as the 'White Knight'.

As my 18th birthday approached, by Dad brought out a Ford Falcon from the vehicle yard for my project...I waited a couple of weeks and when they were away on vacation, I bought a Toyota truck.

This was another great disappointment for my Dad...but I told him that in my years of working at the gas station, the American cars and parts were breaking down and lacked quality...and back in the 1980's, that was true.

The vehicles being made and coming from Japan were of a very high quality and lasted years without breaking down.

In my opinion, the quality of American products and parts has changed since then...and I should have fixed up that car my Dad offered me.

* * * * *

"He's not the guy that got stuck in the front yard, is he?"

Yup, it was me...and that was a question my future father-in-law asked my future wife before she could even tell him my name as she was letting him know of her pending marriage.

Back in High School I first met my wife in Mr. 'C's business law class and asked her if she wanted to study together...I don't know why I parked my brother's 'White Knight' truck in the muddy dirt area in front of their new house; maybe it was because the grass had yet to be planted.

By the time I was done getting out of their front yard, I had sprayed and covered the front of their new house in mud.

My future father-in-law has about 8 martial arts black belts.

So, just after the incident of getting stuck in their front yard...I spent the next month looking over my shoulder as I worked at my Dad's gas station, expecting to be confronted; but it never happened.[103]

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[103] Unfortunately, parents from around town would, from time to time, stop by my house to complain about my 'activities' out in town. I think the worst one was when a Priest dropped me off from catholic school (catechism) on the day they taught us about going into a 'confessional'. I was waiting outside for my name to be called and I saw a frog...then I picked up the frog and my name was called. The Priest didn't

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During the promotion period in 2004, when the official messages come out from Headquarters Marine Corps that identify who can 'pin on' their next rank...we had several Majors that got promoted to LtCol. and several Captains, like me, 'pin on' the rank of Major.[104]

It is customary when you achieve a higher rank that you 'throw' a promotion party to 'thank' those that helped you get to where 'got' ...so-to-speak.

Colonel Dyer was very aware of all the promotions and told all of us together that we needed to throw one hell of a party...and that's what we did.

We took over an entire aviation hangar with stations inside for either pig barbeque, sushi, Mongolian buffet, beer, sake, etc. ...and we even had our own engraved wooden sake cups made to mark the event.

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They say when you stop smoking...you gain about 10 pounds.

Well, I was quitting smokeless tobacco after 'picking up' the habit in 1993 during a boring weekend guard duty at Camp Pendleton...about four months after joining the Marine Corps.[105]

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appreciate me bringing the frog into the confessional (and apparently frogs have some biblical implications). Thank God my Dad answered the door and was agnostic...it was my mother that was the 'die hard' Catholic.

[104] Authorization to 'pin on' your next higher rank is different than getting selected by a promotion board for the next rank. You see, after you get selected by a promotion board, you must wait until Marines of your next rank either retire or leave the Marine Corps due to Congressional limitations on the number of Marines at certain ranks we could have.

[105] Using Smokeless tobacco, like Copenhagen, Skoal, etc., can be referred to as 'Chew', 'Chewing', and 'Dipping'.

My weight in the Marine Corps for the first 10 years stayed steady at 175 lbs.

I broke the habit by coming home from work with some beer and making a super-hot bath...the bath seemed to exhaust me, and the beer relaxed me enough to go to sleep.

The problem was, after a couple of months without 'Dipping' and lifting weights, I had not only gained 10 pounds...I had gained 25 lbs., to bring me up over my max weight to 200 lbs.

There appeared to be no end in sight to my weight gain and I contemplated starting to 'chew' again until I was informed that I needed a skin graph on the inside of my mouth that had me on soup for a week.[106]

While the skin graph procedure was unrelated to my 'chewing' a can of smokeless tobacco every day for the past decade...the dentist said they wouldn't have performed the procedure if I was still 'chewing'.

It was also during my time in Japan that I would start 'throwing up' my food right after I would start to eat...a condition I still randomly have to this day; sometimes now without food prompting the regurgitation.

Lastly, after having trouble with my left leg while jogging or running long distances; along with my legs going numb while laying down; two bulging discs were found in my lower back...and so began years of needles and procedures on my lower back that either temporarily delayed further degradation of my lower spine or just simply didn't work.

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I set up a section for computer programming and development of an on-line newspaper the same way I did years earlier at Marine Corps Air Station New River to develop a website (i.e., buying books and tutoring; plus

[106] After the week of soup, my weight would fall back down to 185 lbs. ...a gain of exactly 10 lbs.

sending them off for school training) ...and just like last time, we were given an award from Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs for a new category titled 'Web-Based Publications' for the annual Public Affairs newspaper, magazine, and radio competitions.[107]

But while the award was a great point of pride for our office, just days later, the senior enlisted leader for our Public Affairs Office would get a DUI on base with three of our junior enlisted Marines in her car.

The Master Gunnery Sergeant's actions had an impact that rippled through our office personnel and hurt the stellar reputation of the office among the command's enlisted and officer leadership...it just seemed like the Marines in the office walked around with their heads down for a couple of months after that.

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He closed the door behind him as he entered my office.

"What the fuck do you think you are doing? I gave you a direct order and yet you went ahead and approved it anyway."

That was the Staff Judge Advocate (SJA), aka the #1 lawyer on the base and for the command, and someone who outranked me.

One of my additional duties was as the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) officer and I had consulted with the Air Station's lawyer as part of my review process before I released the information that was requested.

I told him that I was the FOIA officer and the one responsible for the information released and that if his section, the lawyer section on base, wanted to take over that responsibility I was happy to turn over my

[107] Since the internet was still in its early years, a category for 'Web-Based Publications' had not yet been created at the Department of Defense level to compete against the other services. (i.e., Navy, Air Force, and Army).

responsibilities...but until then, I was responsible, and I make the decision unless he wanted to put his in writing.

Bottom line, I felt his advice was unethical and unprofessional for recommending that I withhold information I felt was open to public disclosure...not to protect the Marine Corps.

And if I did what he wanted me to do and there was a problem, I would be held responsible, not him.[108]

* * * * *

At the end of June in 2006 I would leave Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni...I had seriously considered staying in Japan.

I loved living in Japan, the people, and the fact you didn't have to 'tip' anyone, the 'high speed rail', and you could slurp your noodles without the fear of judgement from others around you in restaurants...because everyone was slurping their noodles down as well.[109]

I could have either transferred to a Marine command aboard the island of Okinawa or go to Tokyo and work at the 'Joint' military command there that oversaw all U.S. military in the country.

But the 'Noise complaints' had worn me down and since the noise incidents kept on happening by Marine and Navy pilots acting like they were trying out for the remake of the

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[108] The senior Marine lawyer never provided me any of his advice/guidance in writing...it was always verbal. And I had a 'spider sense' that his 'local' family connections were in play here.

[109] Most cities you visited in Japan, you couldn't tell any difference from an American city regarding the paved roads, buildings, and restaurants; except for driving on the left side of the road. During one visit back to the 'states' from Japan, I turned off an offramp and started driving on the wrong side of the road only to see headlights from another vehicle coming right at me from the opposite direction.

movie 'Top Gun' ...I figured it was time for the community to hear excuses from a new face.[110]

Back at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs personnel section, they recommended me to work in the Public Affairs Office for the Secretary of Defense...a position you must be nominated for to be approved. The average rank in the office was Lieutenant Colonel and I was a Major, one rank below.

Well, they must have forgot that they fired me in Afghanistan just five years prior...because they approved my transfer.



The local media crew that I had worked with for the past three years took me out to dinner not in Iwakuni, but to a diner in Hiroshima where I was served an awesome Japanese version of a 'tostada' (or Taco Bell Mexican Pizza) that was built up from the base of the plate; it had something similar to a tortilla on the bottom and in the middle, with some type of refried beans, grilled steak, slightly grilled noodles, juicy lettuce and green onions to name a few of the items that went into making this 'dish'.[111]

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[110] I don't know why the sound/volume of an aircraft is not part of the contract negotiations for a 'next generation' aircraft...it seemed to me, the newer the aircraft, the louder impact on the local communities living nearby.

[111] If you are a fan of the TV show 'Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives', you'll know that a lot of restaurants now serve food that mixes cultures.

“We got the bubble headed bleached blonde

Comes on at five

She can tell you 'bout the plane crash

With a gleam in her eye

It's interesting when people die

Give us dirty laundry”

Dirty Laundry – Don Henley

AT-TRI-BU-TION

"You need to see around corners here...and you will be a 'mile wide' and an 'inch deep' in knowledge with all the issues you will be dealing with."

That was the main part of my initial 'in-call' with the deputy of the Pentagon's Office of Public Affairs, Bryan G. Whitman, that worked for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs and the Secretary of Defense.

The 'Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs' (OASDPA) has an 'operations section' that runs the Pentagon press conferences, a section that approves Department of Defense (DoD) support for movies, a Community Relations section, Internet section, and a 'Press' section, full of about 20 or so Public Affairs Officers from all of the military services sitting in an open office space with cubicles that were no higher than your waste...it was referred to as the 'Press Pit'.[112]

I would be working in the Press Pit and assigned first to the 'Personnel and Readiness' team which was led by a Civilian Department of Defense employee.

The main entrance to the Press Pit was located on the 5th Ring of the Pentagon...and in the rear of the Press Pit was a door that led to a hallway where the Pentagon Press Corps were located (i.e., NBC, CNN, FOX, ABC, CBS, etc.).

Below Mr. Whitman in the organization chart regarding the Press Pit, you had a U.S. Military Colonel as the Director and a Civilian Department of Defense employee as the deputy 'press officer' ...there was also an unofficial U.S. military deputy that assisted the Director of the Press Pit when it came to specific military issues.

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[112] I may have missed a 'section' that exists today that didn't exist back in 2006...and I don't think I ever knew where the Internet section was located; I just had their email address.

The press officers were not just given 'accounts' like U.S. Central Command or Personnel matters, they were broken down into three to four person teams regardless of accounts.

The reason for the 'open cubicles' in the office was so that everyone could hear what the others were saying to the media in case one press officer needed to cover for another when they were out of the office.

* * * * *

The Tony Snow Approach

"Who do you think you are?"

"What? Who? Who gave you the authorization to say we are 'looking into the matter'?[113]

That was a phone call I received the second day I was on the job handling personnel matters...it was from a deputy in one of the major administrative sections I was assigned to represent.

Tony Snow was the White House Press Secretary in 2006 and 2007 under President George W. Bush. He had previously served as a speechwriter for George W.'s father when he was president, George H. W. Bush from 1991 to 1993...In-between those jobs he served as a journalist and television news anchor. (Reference #32)

When Tony Snow took over the job of White House Press Secretary in May of 2006, he would answer questions about new issues with obvious answers...no need to check before saying a major policy screwup that just hit the 'wires' was going to be 'reviewed' or 'investigated'; and at times he might have gone a little too far in 'making policy from the podium' on some issues according to critics.

[113] I can't remember specifically what I said to the media, but I also could have said the matter was 'under review' or that 'we were investigating' the claims made in recent media reports.

Going back to the phone call...when a news article came out that factually pointed out some contradictions in personnel policy that negatively impacted service members, I contacted the Personnel department for comment but by the time I started taking queries, I hadn't heard back.

I didn't want to say, 'no comment' to the media...so, I said that we were looking into the matter, and it would be 'reviewed'.[114]

After the deputy on the other end of the phone call was done 'chewing my ass', I then asked for the correction she wanted me to issue...there was silence on the other end of the line.

At the end of the phone call, what I initially responded with was apparently 'good-to-go'.[115]

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Every morning the deputy, Mr. Whitman, would hold a 'press gaggle' with the Pentagon press corps...and on almost every Thursday, there would be a press conference in the 'briefing room' (the one you see on TV all the time with the Pentagon logo in the background).

Briefing cards would be due by 11AM on the day of the press conference...and your required subject matter briefing cards would depend upon the issues of the day, the

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[114] You don't need to have a formal investigation or 'review' for all the issues you tell the media are being 'looked into'...you just need to not forget about them and follow up with the media once you get an answer or an approved statement for release.

[115] I will say, on the flip side of this. I was part of an official rollout and planned 'Public Relations push' of a new travel system for the Department of Defense and all the military services, referred to as 'DTS' (the Defense Travel System). This new 'system' would get rid of the paper for travel claims and move everything online. The 'PR push' had me quoted as saying how great the new travel system was...but not only did the early days of this new 'travel system' not work as intended most of the time...I received calls all the way from Europe...Army Colonels, asking me if I'd ever even tried to use the system myself and how it basically 'sucked'.

accounts you held, and what the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs thought they could get asked about.[116]

You were expected to watch every press conference as well as congressional hearings, and even attend some congressional hearings when the leaders of your accounts testified before congress.

If you were the duty officer for the day or weekend, once the transcript of the Pentagon press conference was delivered to your inbox, you had to re-watch (or listen to) the press conference and confirm the accuracy of the transcript before it was released to the media.

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I had just finished one of my first Pentagon press conferences in which one of the leaders of the Personnel department was briefing the media on a new 'vacation' policy that was being implemented.[117]

I walked out of the briefing room and took a left on the 2nd floor outside 'E-Ring' ...and then proceeded about 15 steps down the hallway to the Department of Defense press section.

The only time the Department of Defense press officers are not available, and the doors are shut to the press section is when a Pentagon press conference is taking place...so I grabbed the double doors with both hands and flung them open; keeping my two arms in the air as I entered the large office space.

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[116] A briefing card was basically a series of 3 to 5 talking points no longer than a single sentence that may or may not include a brief opening statement about the issue in paragraph form.

[117] In the civilian world, they refer to 'time off' from work as 'vacation time', but in the military it is referred to as 'leave'. Every year, a servicemember receives 30 days of 'leave' (2.5 days a month) ...and if you serve on a 'combat' deployment, you earn extra days referred to as 'combat leave'.

As I entered the press section, I noticed the press officers swiveling around in their chairs to acknowledge me...they were smiling at me, then they started to clap, and then I received a standing ovation.

Yes, that's right folks, I had just managed one of, if not the worst press conferences in the history of Pentagon Press Conferences.

How did it go wrong? How could this of happened?

Well, first off, the policy they were announcing was a bad policy made by leaders that had no ability to relate to what was happening in the military services while America was fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan...and service members were doing one year combat tours; sometimes getting extended beyond that.

The new policy was to give the U.S. military personnel being extended beyond their one-year deployment in Iraq with additional vacation time...not monetary bonuses or a salary increase.[118]

The reality was, military life for most personnel, is that they belong to commands that stay busy, even back home, with a high operational tempo.

It's rare that military personnel even get to take their 30 days of leave they receive every year...either due to the operational tempo of their unit or their command denies their request due to the 'needs of the command'.

So, these military personnel could have been given 100 days of additional vacation time...and what would it have mattered for the additional three to six months they were being asked to serve and sacrifice for?

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[118] The Policy would have probably included military personnel serving in Afghanistan and in the Middle East...but this was primarily, at the time, being announced for those servicemembers executing combat deployments in Iraq.

It was the veteran Pentagon reporter from one of the major networks that asked the first question; asking why not award a monetary award versus vacation time?

After that, there was 'blood in the water' for the rest of the press corps that included veterans who served. They pointed out the inability of the Pentagon to guarantee these extended military personnel could take their additional vacation time upon return from deployment.

As I watched the briefer look down at his notes, he had a 3x5 card with scribbles written vertical, horizontal, and diagonal...and things just went downhill from there.[119]

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It was the 2006 anniversary when, for the first time, I didn't want to walk into the Pentagon...I didn't want to work on the 9-11 anniversary anymore; but I didn't have a choice.

That morning in 2006, I had to meet and escort an Army officer who had received burns all over his face and body from the 9-11 attack on the Pentagon for NBC's the 'Today Show'.

If my memory serves me correctly, he didn't work in the area where the plane had hit the building...he was just in that area of the building for a meeting and was coming out of the bathroom at the intersection of the 5th corridor and the outside 'E Ring' on the second floor.

As I briefly mentioned before, as the week of the anniversary of 9-11 approaches, I feel like dark gray

[119] One of my future press conferences I coordinated was for the annual China Military report and in the pre-meeting before the press conference I asked the briefer, an Undersecretary of Defense, Mr. David Sedney, to see his prepared remarks...he had none. I started to sweat, and I begged him to have some prepared remarks on paper...but he declined. Apparently, he had a 'photographic memory' because he 'knocked it out of the park'.

clouds start forming and there is darkness all around me...like walking on the beach in the middle of the night.

It was bad enough having to work in the Pentagon on the Sept. 11th anniversaries...but adding to the activities a full court press upon the American public to sell our justification for the Iraq war as somehow being related to the attacks in New York and at the Pentagon started giving me stomach problems...I didn't see the logic...or connection.

After more stomach and indigestion problems, I would eventually begin taking medication before every meal in order to try and prevent me from throwing it back up.

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Reporters can roam around the Pentagon freely unless the doors to offices are closed or it's a secure area...and having one of the U.S. military services Public Affairs offices with their doors closed is never considered a good sign of press relations.

Pentagon reporters can meet potential sources at one of the many coffee shops located in the building or by just hanging out in the center courtyard when a military service member recognizes them from TV (or other means) and approaches them to say hello.

Some Pentagon reporters have had their emails seized and/or their telephone conversations monitored after a big story breaks with classified information leaked...so they are pretty good at not using those means when dealing with secret or top-secret leaks.

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Under my team, and more specifically, under my account were the issuance of press releases for casualties for Iraq and Afghanistan...and in 2007, then President George W. Bush, announced a troop surge into Iraq of more than 20,000 U.S. military personnel.

Every casualty release was first prepared by their own military service branch and then forwarded to the Department of Defense press office for consolidation into an official Department of Defense press release.

Every one of these 'fact sheets' received from the military services contained information about age, marriage, children, and parents...thousands of stories, about thousands of heroes; and for each one I handled, I felt as though I 'downloaded' their story and kept it with me.

At a certain point in the surge, news reports were coming in of U.S. military caskets coming off commercial airlines at their destination and airline passengers delaying their departure from the aircraft to let the casket be offloaded first and the servicemember's sacrifice honored...but when the casualties began coming in large numbers, sometimes the caskets were offloaded along with the rest of the luggage from the aircraft which caused considerable outrage among the American public. (Reference #33)

Not long thereafter, I would be dispatched to Dover Air Force base in Delaware to oversee how the future U.S. casualties would be taken home to their destination...via private aircraft, three at a time, with only three passenger seats for the casualties' military escorts.

One thing that pissed me off about the casualty releases were the 'AP Style Guide' (Associated Press Style Guide) rules that we had to follow for the writing of these press releases in which apparently the word, 'Marine' was the only U.S. military service in which the word referring to that services' servicemember could be capitalized; not Soldier, not Airmen, and not Sailor...I thought it was complete bullshit and it caused numerous fights with the leadership of the Army, Navy, and Air Force over this stupid rule.[120]

[120] For the record, the leadership at the Department of Defense press office was not filled with retired or former U.S. Marines, it was retired U.S. Army personnel that enforced this policy. I understand the 'industry standard' may be to follow the Associated Press Style Guide,

Lastly, daily I would be asked for casualty totals, and for other statistics from the media…only to find out that the data I was being provided didn't line up with a public website, icasualties.org, that was being operated, maintained, and updated by a Mr. Michael White, from his home (Reference #34) …and until I started 'digging' into how I was receiving casualty data and doing a better job of tracking casualties myself; icasualties.org had better and more detailed data on U.S. military casualties than the Department of Defense was providing to the public.

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Updates or military personnel policy announcements generated inquiries from local media outlets around the country, international media outlets, along with the top U.S. media organizations.

There was no possible way to respond to the hundreds of emails or voicemails I would receive on these days…and so I would first provide responses to the Associated Press and Reuters news wire services.

The reporting from the news wire services were received in every one of the local news organizations' inboxes that subscribed to them…and that was basically everyone.

From there, I could follow-up with the media queries that continued to come in that were seeking more of a tailored response due to their proximity to a U.S. military base or with a reporter that has covered Department of Defense personnel issues for decades.

I guess you could call it the 'triage' of media queries.

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If you were the duty officer for the weekend or your account had a press release that was going out on a Friday afternoon, you could be hard pressed to find one or two

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but that doesn't mean the Department of Defense needs to follow it in their press releases.

members of the media in the 'press pit' still working and hanging out.[121]

On one of these Friday afternoons, I was working and had information to put out to the public.

I found one reporter in the 'press pit'; he was substituting for the regular Pentagon 'beat' reporter for Reuters...and so I thought, hey, I'll not only reward this gentleman for working late on a Friday, but I'll get the information out on the wires right at the time I was authorized to release it.

But that's not the way it worked out for me...

First, I thought I made it clear about the exact time the information could be 'put out' on the news 'wires' as well as the type of attribution.

The attribution would be that the information was provided 'on the condition of anonymity' from a Pentagon official.[122]

Handing a regular Pentagon beat reporter the time of release and type of attribution would normally not be a

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[121] Back when newspapers were the main form of how Americans received their news, it was well known that the least read day of the week regarding circulation numbers was Saturday. So, if you had a controversial issue that you were releasing information on or the information contained in the press release was going to reflect negatively upon the Department of Defense (and the Administration), it would be released on a Friday afternoon and hopefully forgotten by Monday morning. This was referred to at times as 'Fishy Friday' or 'Friday's Fish'.

[122] When you attend the Department of Defense Information School to learn how to do Public Affairs in the military, you are instructed that there is no such thing as 'off the record' or other types of attribution other than, 'on the record' ...and that you never want to say 'no comment' because it gives the media and the public the perception that you are hiding something. But that's not true...at various jobs and levels of dealing with the media, there are numerous forms of attribution that you are authorized to use. Just remember, you must have an agreement that what you are about to say is 'off the record' with the reporter before you say it (and even with 'off the record' you may need to clarify that 'sourcing' doesn't mean attributing 'off the record' comments to an anonymous source).

problem...but the substitute reporter released in information immediately and when he attributed the information he received from me as coming from an unnamed Department of Defense spokesperson that worked in the Department of Defense press office handling military personnel issues...you could have walked into the Press Office and pointed out exactly who it was.

As I read his reporting on the internet, I ran back into the press pit and pleaded with him on how much he just 'fucked me' with his actions...I think I came close to getting on my knees; I mean, I wasn't asking for him to change the story, I was just very aware I was going to be in trouble.[123]

As I returned to my desk, someone came into the press office and yelled, "Hey Upton, Whitman wants to see you."

Fuuuuuuuuuuuck!

As I approached the side of the opening to Whitman's office, I slide my left foot in slowly because his desk was right by his doorway...and while I told him I had no idea how this could have happened, he knew I'd fucked up; but he gave me another chance and for that I'm grateful.

It was a lesson about only trusting reporters you know you can trust if you're going to give them controversial 'embargoed' information on a timeline with conditional attribution.

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U.S. Navy Commander Gregory Hicks slammed the back door of the press room shut with one swing of his right hand and locked the door...preventing any media from entering the press office from where they worked in the hallway directly behind our office.

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[123] That's why the title of this chapter is broken up into hyphenated parts because that's how I was speaking to this reporter...I was so stressed out, I was gasping for breath and hyperventilating as I tried to speak to him.

I looked to the front of the office space and saw the large double doors to our office facing the outside E Ring corridor as being shut and locked as well.

Just days before, there had been a very rare editorial published by the Military Times publishing company that produces tabloid newspapers for all the services...calling on then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to resign.[124]

This was also the day after the 2006 midterm elections during the second term of then President George W. Bush's presidency...and the Democrats had retaken control of both houses of Congress.

The announcement from Hicks was that Rumsfeld was gone...and would pretty much be gone as soon as he could arrive at the White House for the announcement.

We waited in the 'locked down' office until the announcement was over.

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The thing about working in the Department of Defense press office and being a part of a three-member team with an appointed member of that team being identified as your 'leader' ...is that your team leader, in my case a Department of Defense civilian, has no role (or input) in writing your evaluation(s).

So, after two years of my civilian team 'leader' taking four-hour lunches about twice a week with what seemed to be a different U.S. Army Colonel every week...there would be times where she would come back in the office and try to tell me what to do when she didn't have a fucking clue as to what was going on.

At times, I would just get up from my desk, turn my back to her, and walk out of the office as she continued to try

[124] I didn't observe a similar editorial from the Military Times publishing company before then, nor since.

and tell me to 'get back here' ...so, it was time for me to not be on the same 'Manpower and Personnel' account with her.

I was given a new account, but one that was about to be elevated in status among policy leaders at the Pentagon to 'Assistant Secretary of Defense' status...that's one step below the Undersecretary for Policy who is one step below the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary of Defense.

It was to be named 'APSA', which stood for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs...this included countries like China, Japan, North and South Korea, Australia, India, Indonesia, etc.

Little did I know, my name being attributed to statements from the Department of Defense regarding China would have my personal email accounts hacked and China 'men in black' randomly stopping me on my jogs near the Lincoln memorial asking for directions...I would also learn my name regarding such Department of Defense statements on China would appear in college textbooks regarding Asian affairs.[125]

I was also put in charge of scheduling and hosting the first visit to the Pentagon by Chinese Public Affairs Officers.

[125] Not long after taking this new 'account' for China, my personal yahoo account was hacked. So, I changed the password. But after the second time my email was hacked, I changed the password to a mixture of the entire alphabet (some shift key, some not) and added on a mixture of ten numbers on the end of that (again, some shift key, some not) ...it took the hackers about a week to overcome that long password; and so, because I had no valuable information in my email account, I just let it be.



That's Mr. Terry Mitchell, audiovisual division chief for the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the podium in the Pentagon briefing room with Public Affairs officials from China during their visit...and that's me in the background to the left of the Pentagon logo.

The biggest event of the year for this account would be the release of the annual 'China military power report'.

I was once threatened by the Public Affairs Officer for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for not turning the report over to him before the press briefing...but because I knew of the U.S. Navy CAPTAIN as a chronic 'leaker' to the media, I told him I never had a copy...and I didn't work for him, I worked for the Secretary of Defense.

Now, leaking in the military by the military services is not limited to any one service...they all do it, even against the wishes of the President. They do this to gain leverage on Capitol Hill for more money, new programs, and continued existence.

For example, during the Obama Presidency, after the killing of Osama bin Laden, the administration didn't want any more information released...but since the U.S. Navy SEALs are the ones that killed him, which service do you think leaked that information?

Another example during the Obama Presidency, after the U.S. Marines flew MV-22s into Libya to rescue a 'downed' U.S. pilot in March of 2011 (Reference #35), the Marine Corps was told not to release any information about it by the Administration...but since the Marine Corps wanted continued support from Congress for MV-22 aircraft funding and growth, who do you think leaked that information?

* * * * *

"Where's your old man kid?"

This was a question from a man that had pulled up to my Dad's gas station with an overheated mini car...after he exited the vehicle, he stood somewhere in-between six and seven feet.

The best way I can explain his body and frame would be like an NFL tight end...like NFL Hall of Famer Shannon Sharpe.

He looked around as if to assess the situation...hmmm, a young kid, still in elementary school (it was the summer of my seventh grade), all alone and in charge of this gas station.

At first, I was pissed because nobody had ever referred to my father as an 'old man'.

Then we got to talking while I cooled down his car...apparently, he was a U.S. Navy SEAL based out of San Diego.

I've never forgotten my conversation with him because of the way he carried himself, his confidence, and the way he talked about things.

I've also never forgotten about the SEALS that slept right next to me aboard the USS Peleliu before going into Camp Rhino, Afghanistan after 9-11.[126]

So, when a U.S. flagged ship was hijacked by Somali pirates in 2009 off the coast of Africa and U.S. Navy SEALS executed the Pirates...I was the weekend duty officer and called into the Pentagon to help coordinate the immediate press conference that was about to take place via video teleconference with the head of U.S. Navy Central Command out of Bahrain.

I thought to myself, if there was no traffic, I could make it into the Pentagon from my home in about 30 minutes...with traffic, it could take an hour, but I needed to make it in 30 minutes!

Since it was a weekend, there was traffic, and so I took a backroad shortcut that I knew about...which was a very 'winding' road.

My blackberry (these days you might refer to a blackberry as a smartphone) was 'lighting up' from the Pentagon media.

At one point, I dropped the phone as I was driving...I was swerving all over the road as I reached down for it at a high rate of speed and thankfully, I made it into the office in about 30 minutes.

The press conference by the Commanding Officer of U.S. Navy Central Command was a massive public relations win for not only the Navy...but our country.

* * * * *

I got a call from my brother Tom that it appeared my father, who had been relocated to a Hospice in the

[126] I'm not sure anyone was really sleeping, but while I was laying in my rack wide awake, the SEALS were constantly working on their backpacks and gear.

Sacramento area a couple of years prior, had about 24 hours to live.

I got immediate approval from the command and traveled as fast as I could to land in San Francisco and drive to Sacramento from there.

About two minutes after I arrived in his room and sat down, he took his last breath.

A nurse was walking by, and I informed her of what had just happened...I had the mindset that I was in a hospital where they would try to resuscitate him, but she just looked directly at me and said, "He was waiting for you."

* * * * *

"Hello, yes, I'm sorry but the Deputy Assistant Secretary was in a car accident this morning and will be unable to meet with you for the scheduled interview."

That was my telephone conversation with former CBS News reporter and evening news anchor Dan Rather.

What had happened is that one of the Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretaries had made his own interview agreement with Mr. Rather and once I was notified and his leadership was notified there was a problem.

You see, Mr. Rather was fired from CBS News for a controversial report he did in 2004 on the current President at that time, George W. Bush...saying that President Bush had gone AWOL during his time serving in the Texas Air National Guard.[127]

The interview was never rescheduled.

Bottom Line: if you are working in (or for) the Department of Defense and approached or talking with a member of the media and mutually agree to an interview...refer the

[127] AWOL = Absent Without Leave, i.e., unapproved vacation or not showing up to work on time or as required.

reporter to contact Public Affairs to coordinate approval by leadership and for scheduling.

* * * * *

"Your youth and inexperience are no match for my age and wisdom."

That was the quote (or something like it) that was written on a piece of paper and taped to the side of a file cabinet located in the civilian deputy's office for the Department of Defense press office.

While the civilian deputy seemed to keep out of the politics of the Pentagon, it seemed that other civilians, specifically political appointees, used their influence to change their political appointments into permanent civilian jobs by the time the next presidential election came around.

What is commonly referred to as 'Think Tanks', such as the Rand Corporation or the American Enterprise Institute, are in and around the Washington D.C. area, and are filled with either Republican or Democratic civilians just waiting for their political party to come into power so they could be appointed to high level policy positions in the Department of Defense.

Defense contractors, mostly coming from companies owned by American businessman Ross Perot, would annually undercut and underbid Department of Defense contracts by way of filling those contractor positions with inexperienced 'kids' fresh out of college to stay under the low 'bid' they made to win the contact. One of those contracts was for the handling of sexual assault in the military. The time it took each time one of these 'low bid' contracts was awarded to get the 'kids' up to speed on the military, the issues, and how the Pentagon worked wasted months into their contract award.[128]

Meanwhile, I had gone from my boss at Quantico, about a decade ago, telling me that, "reporters are smarter than

[128] Ross Perot died in 2019.

Public Affairs Officers" to observing how the internet and the access to 'free news' was resulting in the 'buying out' of the older and more experienced reporters in order to 'make way' for more 'kids' fresh out of college and into the news business ...not only was non-partisan reporting the first victim of this, but reporters seemed to become more lazy on the facts and more concerned with 'advocacy' for their political views.[129]

Additionally, for any 'press desk' at the 'Headquarters' level, operations are about 90% defensive (reactionary) from incoming queries or significant events, scandals, etc. ...so leadership (especially new political leadership), from time to time, will try to create a 'proactive' cell to, as they will say, "to get out all of the 'good news' stories the mainstream media are not reporting."

But these 'proactive' cells ran into two problems each time it was tried:

> (1) The Department of Defense gets accused of using or releasing propaganda upon the American public because these 'cells' are created and managed more by political appointees than Public Affairs Officers, and
>
> (2) These 'cells' over time lack the knowledge and constant contact the 'defensive' press officer has with their policy accounts. What I'm trying to say is that the creation of two 'cells' for the same account resulted in the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing. It would be well advised to just place the personnel you planned for 'proactive' duties on the same press desk with the 'defensive' press officer vice a separate office.

That doesn't mean you cannot launch proactive public relations projects or release 'good news'; but like I said,

[129] In the years that followed, the annual 'turnover' of reporters at most of these news outlets was hard to keep track of...and continues to this day.

Public Affairs Officers in the military are primarily defensive in operations.

The perfect mix I would say would be around 90/10 or at the most, 15 percent proactive, 85% reactive.

Just know, that if you constantly release information to the media, while you may get more publicity...you will also get more questions and controversy.

Lastly, when I started out in Public Affairs, what the leaders and commanders asked for was, "Where is my 'Public Affairs Guidance'?" ...like it was the roadmap for them to navigate an issue or significant event. But while I was at the Pentagon, requesting 'Public Affairs Guidance' transitioned into asking for, "Where is my Strategic Communications?"

The 'myth' of needing to have great 'Strategic Communications' spread rapidly in the Pentagon to the point where every major policy section seemed to want to create a new personnel position to have their own 'Strategic Communications' advisor.

By the time I left the military in 2016, leaders and commanders no longer were asking for 'Strategic Communications', they had a new 'buzzword' to solve every problem or controversial issue they faced...they were asking for 'Narratives'.

If only they had the right 'narrative' for an issue...all would be well in their world!

* * * * *

During my three years at the Pentagon Press Desk, I would undergo a failed surgery on my lower back. They said they couldn't 'get' to where they needed to 'get to' to do what needed to be done.

I returned to work still in massive pain and was advised to take my lunch time to slip into the Secure/Classified computer room to lay down flat on the floor...and when I was home, laying on the bed, my kids bumping the bed or

jumping on it would cause me serious discomfort with nerve pain.

I had been prescribed bottles of Percocet for the pain, but this was around the time its use was beginning to be scrutinized...so, next I was handed a full bottle of a nerve blocking drug called 'Tramadol' which I continued to take for the next decade until retirement and then for a couple of years after that...and I don't think I've ever returned to a normal sleep pattern since.

Lastly, I had done a good job of keeping pets from our home; no cats or dogs...but then one day after work, while driving down the (four and sometimes five lane) 495 Interstate that encircles Washington D.C., with everyone going about 80 miles per hour, the car in front of me threw a small kitten out their window.

Everyone miraculously came to a stop during 'rush hour' on what is commonly referred to as the 'Beltway' and the kitten was found alive after crawling up the wheel well of a vehicle that had stopped...and so, I volunteered to take it home.



The kitten was named 'Beltway' of course...and what followed were two dogs and about three more cats.

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I don't think I had a more challenging or rewarding job than working as a spokesperson on issues that dominated our nation and international headlines...I will always be grateful for the opportunity and the trust placed in me to do the job.

Near the end of my three-year tour at the Department of Defense press office, I'd begun to hear rumors regarding an upcoming surge of forces in Afghanistan and a change in command structure there...they would add two new commands, one for 'training' Afghans and one for 'warfighting', both three-star officer billets. They would be subordinate to the four-star billet already there in charge of all NATO forces in Afghanistan; it was referred to as ISAF (International Security Assistance Force).

The three star that would oversee the warfighting, U.S. Army Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez, was looking for a personal Public Affairs Officer and the Public Affairs Office for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was handling the interviews.

So, I interviewed, then, I got called back to interview again, and awaited word while I was transferred to serve as the deputy for Headquarters Marine Corps Community Relations located in the Pentagon.

While I had promised myself after my last deployment to Iraq that I needed to get a tattoo on my forehead to never deploy again…I had been away from war for six years while others served yearlong tours…some a year and a half and some doing back-to-back one-year tours with little rest back home.

Bottom line, I felt it was time for me to find a way back into the war zone to carry my part of the workload.

"Hello, hello, baby, you called? I can't hear a thing
I have got no service in the club, you say, say?
Wha-wha-what did you say, huh? You're breaking up on me
Sorry, I cannot hear you, I'm kinda busy
K-kinda busy, k-kinda busy
Sorry, I cannot hear you, I'm kinda busy"

"Telephone" – Lady Gaga [130]

[130] Members of the 82nd Airborne Division posted their 'remake' music video of Lady Gaga's hit song 'Telephone' in April of 2010 while deployed in a very remote part of Afghanistan. It was the beginning of many more 'remake' music videos by combat deployed U.S. service members. *(Reference #36)*

Rolling Stone Article May Have Legs

I had learned my lesson in Haiti when after my arrival I got some 'rack-time' before I checked into work...so, after about four or five days of travel from the U.S. with a stopover in Kuwait before reaching Kabul and my next command, I showed up with a perfect 23-hour beard growth (24 hours would make me out of regulations) while looking like I hadn't slept in the three days (and I really hadn't slept except dozing off on the plane rides).

After being introduced to (then) U.S. Army Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez, I asked to 'get to work' right away...and I was sent to get some rack-time.

Everyone on the command deck thought my effort was admirable.[131]

* * * * *

My deployment to Haiti may have had some structure regarding my job description and duties, but once in Iraq, there was a broad framework of what I was supposed to do and what was expected because it was a new command...the same was the case for arriving in Afghanistan and the setting up of a new command that would oversee all combat operations.

At one point during my deployment, we had a high ranking officer, who was also a reservist and part time blogger...when he arrived, he chose to blog about all the problems he thought he saw and observed in just the first hours of his arrival instead of observing for a while, then

[131] In my first days getting settled, I would return from the shower area mid-day and be standing near a wall in which a Vehicle born IED exploded, killing and injuring U.S. personnel. I felt my brain move from the front of my head to the back as a very powerful 'wave' of air hit me when I turned toward the sound of the explosion and looked over the wall.

finding a 'hole' (or duties) that needed to be 'filled'; or maybe where he thought he could contribute the most.

When you arrive to a new command, try not to be a part of the problem...and try to be a part of solutions and contribute to the mission![132]

So, the first thing I felt I needed to do was meet with Lieutenant General Rodriguez (aka 'Rod') and ask what he wanted me to do and what he expected of me...I was told to find U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Edward ('Ed') Ledford who, at the time, was the sole member of what would later be referred to as the 'Command Operations and Engagement Center' (i.e., the COEC, pronounced, "Co-Eck').

Ed was a speechwriter and overall coordinator of VIP visits to the command...along with helping on issues when help needed to be given.

Also, before I left my first meeting with Lieutenant General Rodriguez, we agreed to set up at least one media engagement a week...and possibly additional ones if the tasking came from our higher command in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF); we were the International Security Assistance Force 'Joint Command' (i.e., IJC, with the first 'I' referring to ISAF, an acronym itself)

I had also started producing a modified 'early bird' (daily media clip service) every day that I had first started doing while at the Pentagon Press Office; it was tailored to my accounts and clients' interests.

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[132] The other thing to make sure you don't do while assigned and working in a 'Joint' command, (i.e., a command with personnel from all four of the U.S. military services) is to make sure that you don't just work with and associate with members of your branch of service. Regardless of what they told you when you joined your branch of service, no one 'branch' is better than the others in all aspects of warfighting.

Because time with Lieutenant General Rodriguez was hard to come by, I also developed a nightly 'read book' of what I felt were 'must read' articles that the boss could read before he went to sleep or take with him on the long plane rides he would regularly go on visiting NATO commands or Afghan military and police leadership across the country.

Lastly, one of the keys to being an effective Public Affairs Officer for a general officer is finding out ways to carve out time...we would even pick up a reporter, for example, from the Washington Post, on a dirt road in Kabul to do an interview traveling from one appointment to another.[133]

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Again, just to reiterate, the NATO command environment that was being setup for Afghanistan in Kabul in the later part of 2009, there would be a continuance of an overall NATO command, ISAF, that would oversee two NEW major subordinate commands...one for training the Afghan military (referred to as the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan, aka NTM-A), and the other for handling/fighting the war on a daily basis, the IJC.

During a visit earlier in the year, then Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, had asked for the resignation of the current commander of ISAF, U.S. Army General David McKiernan after only about 11 months on the job in Afghanistan...no specific reason was given for the resignation request other than to say that with the implementation of a new strategy and a new leadership would be in the best interest of our national security and the success of our mission in Afghanistan. (Reference #37)

Now, far be it from me to provide a different version of reality to the 'politics at hand' ...but in my opinion, after just a few months of observation, General McKiernan's requested resignation wasn't because leadership at the

[133] The reporter was named Ernesto Londono, who at the time, worked for the Washington Post...and we sat three wide in the back seat of a small SUV to do the interview...and we didn't drop him off back where we picked him up.

Pentagon and the White House felt he was a failed battlefield commander, he was just not a good host to what I refer to as, 'battlefield tourism'.

I believe this because first, you need to understand this was not just a U.S. command, it was a NATO command filled with approximately 20 or so NATO forces plus United Nations involvement that wanted to support the mission...and that meant visits by not only their country's military leadership, but also their civilian military leadership in addition to their Prime Ministers or elected Presidents.

And I didn't even mention the numerous 'think tanks' from Washington D.C. (some sent by the President to validate his military doctrine [aka 'surge'] in the country) ...all these fucking 'battlefield tourists' wanted to be catered to with briefings and VIP comforted visits to the battlefield; forget the reality of a war going on.

So, just to confirm, as the new 'cycle' of battlefield tourists arrived in Afghanistan from Europe or the United States, they were open about how badly the previous command had failed to yield to their VIP hosting demands...we just had to make sure they had 'chilled' water to go along with every briefing and tour they received on multiple stops in the middle of a war zone.[134]

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In July of 2021, the President of Haiti was assassinated...and the people that were responsible gained access to his residence by identifying themselves as 'DEA' (U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency) agents.

You would be surprised how far and where you could go in a country where U.S. forces are stationed...and even more

[134] Another reason for many 'battlefield tourists' were monthly tax breaks, in the thousands of dollars, for only being on the ground for about 24 hours in a combat zone. Eventually, from what I understand, these tax breaks have since been modified.

so when you are wearing an American military uniform, carry a gun, and have silver on your collar.

With that said, one of my first assignments by Lieutenant General Rodriguez was to set up a press conference with the Afghanistan Secretary of Defense…and I found my way into the Secretary's office in about 'three moves' (basically) and a short couple of hours after I received the tasking.

1. I got a ride to the Afghan's Department of Defense area in Kabul and got out at the front gate.
2. My visit was welcomed by the gate guard who helped point me to where the Secretary's office (and building) was located.
3. Once I entered the building and asked where the Secretary's office was located, I was escorted into his office where I sat in a chair until he got back from using the bathroom.

I was sitting there proud of myself and as I started to explain my presence and the request from my boss to the Secretary…when his U.S. Marine full bird Colonel 'advisor' walked into the room and asked me a couple of questions:

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"How did you get in here?"

Well, long story short, the Colonel called up my boss' office right there from the Secretary's phone and it was determined that a press conference by my boss would not take place with the Afghan Secretary of Defense, but with my boss' equivalent peers…the generals in charge of the Afghan military and police.

The press conference went well in my opinion, but comments made there by my boss would be used a decade later by those in the media that were critical of U.S. generals talking about 'progress' being made in Afghanistan after the Taliban retook control of the country in the latter part of 2021.

Regardless, with my quick actions to execute a task I'd been given, I believe it impressed the command group I would be working with for the next year.

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When you work for a general officer, more times than not, the Chief of Staff is the one selected by the general to ensure taskings from the general are executed because of all the other bullshit the generals must do...like hosting VIP tours every day or attending change of command ceremonies with European allies, etc.[135]

So, the night that Lieutenant General Rodriguez's Chief of Staff didn't stop me from just walking into his office was a big deal to me...because everybody fought for time with the 'boss' (and most of those fighting for 'time' were insecure officers, retired contractors, or useless advisors that just wanted to be heard and feel relevant).

I'd altered my sleep patterns so I could stay up all night and be one of the last persons to have the option of time with the General if I felt like I needed to tell him something or approve something...sometimes it was walking with him to his 'rack' (his bedroom quarters) at about 2AM.

One time, I remember, the Chief of Staff was arguing with the general's translator because the translator spoke one of the two major languages of Afghanistan during a visit to Kandahar that was more dominate in Kabul than the language dominant in Kandahar.

Bottom line, the Chief of Staff for a major command is the one that handles almost all day-to-day operations of the command and is bogged down in the details...and under an incredible amount of stress.

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[135] While not in a combat zone, back in the United States, most General officers are gone from their commands attending promotion boards or being tasked to 'put out a fire' from an unexpected event by either heading up an investigation or putting a 'team' together to address a new and upcoming issue; or an old issue like Marine Corps bootcamp deaths.

But he/she does have one or two of the general's aides to help him...along with the staff and entire command.

And if they do a great job...more than likely, they will be selected for promotion to general officer.

* * * * *

"Are they going to want me to make a speech or give any remarks?" Lieutenant General Rodriguez asked me as we got into a vehicle headed for the headquarters of the Turkish contingent located in Kabul.

"Uhhhhhh, no...and I asked them about this via email and they said no," I responded.

But some of these generals that have been around for about three decades in the military and about a decade as a general officer, can sometimes have a 'spider sense' about things. [136]

So, we arrived, and of course they wanted him to make remarks...which could also be perceived as giving a speech.

I left the gathering and went out to the vehicle to sit and call the speechwriter, Lieutenant Colonel Ed Ledford, to dictate a speech to me for the general.

Ledford got me started as I wrote in large capital letters on blank pieces of white paper...but then he told me I would have to, "do the rest and that I could do it."

That is when I wrote my first of many speeches for other people that I never imagined I would be able to do...sometimes the generals would use all of it and sometimes they might only use a little.[137]

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[136] 'Spider sense' being a reference to 'Spider Man'.

[137] Later in my career of writing speeches, my most nervous moments would be when a general officer didn't review the speech...kindov like I spoke about when talking to the speechwriter for General Wesley Clark when they were in Haiti, I could have written, "Go fuck yourself San Diego," and it would have been read mindlessly.

And as I talked about before regarding the role of the Chief of Staff...well, after I showed the 'Chief' the emails confirming no speech was required, he had a very frank conversation with his equivalent peer for the Turkish forces.

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At some point in my life, I would start to feel this electric type of tingling on the left side of my head if I was doing something that would get me in trouble...on my right side if it was good-to-go.

Doesn't really happen all the time...just in certain situations.

The only time I ever thought I was going to die in a war zone was when Lieutenant General Rodriguez decided to take a ride with the Afghan Air Force...it was a small helicopter, like the U.S. military's UH-1, except this one had a large fuel tank in the cabin.



The pilot flew the helicopter like he was drunk, 'fishtailing' the tail of the aircraft 'back and forth' ... 'back and forth' the entire trip.



U.S. Army General David M. Rodriguez talking with an Afghan commander during a battlefield circulation.

The left side of my neck was on fire, and I just looked around at the others in the back cabin (Rod was riding in the front) and gave up resistance...because I didn't really think I had a choice in what was about to happen.

But hey, it all worked out and we made it to our destination...whew!

* * * * *

The Trickle-Down Effect

My 'Daily Media Reports' I produced to the staff involved a mix of national and local reporting throughout Afghanistan and in the nearby border countries (Iran, Pakistan, etc.) ...and at a certain point my 'data mining' of the internet was providing supplemental information to what the 'intel' section was providing to the leadership.[138]

[138] When using 'local' reporting by independent media outlets throughout Afghanistan or Iraq or any 'third world' country the U.S. is involved in, you must ask yourself how this media organization got (or is being) financed...is it possibly the U.S. State Department, CIA, or

Near the end of my year-long deployment, after scanning thousands of articles and listening to what radio stations I could, I started to realize something in common with what was being reported locally in Afghanistan and what I had observed in Iraq regarding major news reporting that first originated in the United States...but it only applied to two major news organizations:

1. The New York Times
2. The Wall Street Journal

If something major was reported from either of these news organizations and it pertained to Afghanistan or the nearby region, the Afghan media would preface their reporting with the name of the news organization; for example, "The New York Times is reporting..." or "The Wall Street Journal is reporting..."

It appears the name of these two news organizations translated through the various languages of the region because everyone knew about the city of New York and Wall Street, or it was the reputation of the news organization being well known throughout the world.

Regarding how they may have all known (or knew) about the Wall Street Journal, is because of its reputation regarding its reporting on wealth and how what goes on there (on Wall Street) can impact the world.[139]

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maybe even stories created and placed by an intelligence agency from another country. By having your 'finger' on the pulse of the daily reporting and military actions, you should be able to distinguish the difference.

[139] During this deployment, I attended a U.S. State Department/Afghanistan government joint speaking engagement with a panel discussion on corruption in Afghanistan. During the panel discussion, U.S. State Department representatives were reminded by an Afghan government representative, that corruption was not limited to Afghanistan, and referred to what had gone on in the past couple of years in the U.S. with, "your Wall Street" as he put it (referring to the mortgage crisis that began in 2007 due to corruption in the U.S. housing market [among other things] that resulted in a global financial crisis).

So, if I had a reporter from one of these two news organizations available to me or my boss for an interview and we needed to get a certain message out, I knew that if I used them…the message would trickle down to the people of Afghanistan along with the nearby regions and it would probably be viewed with more credibility than messages communicated via other means.

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I've worked for several general officers and the best way I could describe Lieutenant General Rodriguez was that he was commonly referred to, as a 'gentle giant'…because he was very tall and didn't get on someone's ass unless they deserved it.

Rod believed in doing more listening than talking with his counterparts in the Afghan military which served him well regarding his relationship with them…and he certainly made sure to care for his staff that worked tirelessly for him.

But, because he liked to 'disarm' those he worked with and those he encountered, he liked to make self-deprecating comments (or actions) about himself…and I warned him not to do that with the media that he didn't know or that didn't know him well.

Just before he left after his two years in Afghanistan, a Washington Post article (Reference #38) would highlight an abbreviation he would have his index cards, SDD, when meeting with 'prominent' visitors…it stood for, "slow down dummy," as a reminder to himself to take his time explaining himself.[140]

[140] Although, with some of the things I've written in my journal…maybe I should have taken my own advice! I will say this though, after I retired, I contacted the author of that Washington Post article to express my displeasure with this part of his reporting. I might have also contacted a couple of New York Times reporters as well for writing about how the American strategy in Afghanistan was failing without even mentioning Pakistan one time.

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The other thing you must do when you work for older general officers whose eyesight is not what it used to be, is to make the text on printed out documents larger than a small 10-point font. That is, if you want it to be read in a timely manner.

So, at about 2 a.m., after returning to Kabul from a visit to Kandahar with Lieutenant General Rodriguez, I received in my email an article from the publication 'Rolling Stone' ...titled, 'The Runaway General'.

There was no context to the email, just the Adobe PDF attachment sent to me from the press desk at our command.

I started reading the article and realized that Lieutenant General Rodriguez, who attended West Point with U.S. Army General Stanley McCrystal, would need to be made aware of this article first thing in the morning.

McCrystal, the overall commander of all military forces in Afghanistan was the focus of the article...and we had all just spent what appeared to be a very successful day in Kandahar.

If I was working overnight and needed to get something in front of Rod in the morning, I would place it in a folder and slide it under the "command deck's" door...so I had a couple of hours to 'cut and paste' a very small font into a word document with either size 14 or 16 font.

Honestly, I don't remember feeling that the article would result in (then) President Barack Obama relieving McCrystal of his command...but I felt it would have an impact on our higher command in a way which they would have to focus on it and respond.



U.S. Army General Stanley McCrystal (right) with General David M. Rodriguez in Kandahar on what would be McCrystal's last full day in Afghanistan.

So, when I slid the article under the door at about 5 a.m., I prefaced in writing on the front of the folder, "This article may have 'legs.'" ...and ever since McCrystal was summoned to the White House within hours of the article's publication, I was mocked (jokingly) by the staff for not anticipating the full impact and 'ripple effect' of the article.

They would say to me, "MAY have legs? ...MAY have legs?"

* * * * *

"WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?"

“I THOUGHT YOU SAID THOSE QUESTIONS WOULD NOT BE ASKED AS PART OF THE GROUND RULES ...HOW THE FUCK DID THAT HAPPEN?”

“HUH, HOW THE FUCK DID THAT HAPPEN?”

As I lowered the phone and slowly looked over at speechwriter U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Ed Ledford, who had worked for Lieutenant General Rodriguez for years, he had heard the screaming coming out of the phone I had up to my ear. He had been on the end of ass chewings from Rod before...he said, “Hey, it’s alright, just come over here and sit down and get back to work. Move on.”

We had just returned from a visit by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his Public Affairs Officer, then U.S. Navy CAPTAIN John F. Kirby...the same guy who threatened me when I worked on the Pentagon press desk for not turning over the ‘China Military Report’ to him.

Kirby had two reporters with him, one of whom was David Ignatius of the Washington Post, the other was Thom Shanker of the New York Times. It was agreed by Kirby that if Rod conducted an interview with them, there would be no questions about McCrystal due to an ongoing investigation regarding the Rolling Stone article...these questions would be ‘above his pay grade’ at this point with the White House involved.

But Ignatius ‘went there’ and asked questions that were part of the ongoing investigation...and while Rod handled it perfectly calm during the interview, he was pissed that he was ever put in that position of having to answer those questions and/or how he let himself get put in that position by agreeing to do the interview. Shanker stuck to the ground rules.

Lastly, I talked before about my time in Japan and how one DUI by a leader can decimate the moral of a unit...and when we visited the command McCrystal had just held before this interview, the entire command deck was demoralized and unfocused due to the recent events.

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The only girl my parents ever let into our home was Tiffany...and she woke me up from a nap onetime with a kiss...and as I woke up and looked at her blue eyes, it was one of the most valued moments in my life.

Tiffany used to always say, "something bad always happens for something good" ...so, when I got the news that I was not selected for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel from my current rank of Major, I felt, and the command deck felt bad for me, but I also told myself something good would come out of this development.[141]

What you must understand about the Marine Corps promotion system is above most, that I believe in its ethics and professionalism...it gives preference to the needs of the Marine Corps; meaning, if the Marine Corps needs more Lieutenant Colonel computer programmers than Public Affairs Officer (on a certain year), it promotes the computer programmers.

When I was counseled on not getting selected for promotion, I told the person counseling me that I had planned on retiring anyway...but that wasn't true. I felt embarrassed, unsuccessful, and became somewhat depressed.

When I returned from the deployment, unknowingly, I had gone from 185 lbs. to around 160 lbs. and looking skeletal at close to six feet tall until my wife said something to me about gaining weight.

I also had my first asthma attack during this deployment running to make a C-130 plane with the general and command staff...I would try to breath and get an itch in my throat and then cough, repeat, etc.; but there was no way I

[141] I might have never even attended College if Tiffany hadn't convinced me to show up on the first day of Cuesta Community College in San Luis Obispo in the Fall of 1987 to register...and they put me in classes.

was raising my hand to stop a plane taxiing down the runway.[142]

During a one-year deployment you get to go home for two weeks of leave/vacation…this involved traveling through the country of Kuwait where we had a U.S. military base.

Stopping in Kuwait was fine for the food or whatever movie entertainment they offered as you waited to either go home or go to into the combat zone…and in the living area, you could just feel the negative energy of those leaving the war zone and those not wanting to return to it.[143]

But the U.S. military base in Kuwait was not the place with the smell of urine and poop that got inside my psyche…it would be a visit to the northern region of Afghanistan where Lieutenant General Rodriguez apologized to a community for a U.S. airstrike that accidently killed about 12 of their policeman, sons, and husbands.

I've never forgotten the bathroom experience I had when I asked where the bathroom was, and I needed to go No. 2.

I was pointed to a mud hut about 18 feet long and six feet wide with heavy cotton comforters placed over the six door-like entrances to the bathroom…the smell of feces and urine was overwhelming inside the unventilated area where you would squat over a dirt hole.[144]

Ever since that day, and probably combined with Haiti, the smell of urine and feces…I can't stand it…and I'm not sure if it's due the conditions I experienced or my feelings for those that must endure that way of life.

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[142] There is no history of asthma in my family and I still, to this day, have breathing difficulties.

[143] On my way back to Kabul from leave, the Soldier sitting next to me had been hiding out in Kuwait for three months.

[144] Even though Lieutenant General Rodriguez had brought us into an area where we were outnumbered by local Afghans five or six to one, this bathroom experience impacted me more.

The annual Marine Corps Birthday Ball is a celebration of Marine Corps history and traditions. It represents where the Marine Corps started and where it is now; while giving us a glimpse of the past, present, and future.

Throughout the world on 10 November, Marines celebrate the birth of their Corps -- the most loyal, feared, revered, and professional fighting force the world has ever known.

In 1921, the 13th Commandant, General John A. Lejeune, issued Marine Corps Order No. 47, Series 1921. General Lejeune's order summarized the history, mission, and tradition of the Corps. It further directed that the order be read to all Marines each year on 10 November to honor the founding of the Marine Corps. Soon after, Marine commands began to not only honor the birthday, but celebrate it.

The first "formal" Birthday Ball took place in Philadelphia in 1925. Guests included the Commandant, the Secretary of War (known today as the Secretary of Defense), and a host of statesmen and elected officials.

Over the years the annual Birthday Ball grew, taking on a life of its own. In 1952, Commandant General Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr. formalized the cake-cutting ceremony and other traditional observances. Current Marine Corps policy mandates that the first piece of cake must be presented to the oldest U.S. Marine present and passed to the youngest Marine representing the passing of tradition from generation to generation.

On 10 November, regardless of where Marines are stationed or deployed, you will always hear "Happy Birthday Marine."[145]

[145] This excerpt was taken from official U.S. Marine Corps websites with no author cited.

THE PA PLAYBOOK

I returned to Headquarters Marine Corps in the Pentagon as the deputy of the Community Relations section...a post I mentioned I briefly held prior to my last deployment to Afghanistan.

This was during a time of budget and personnel cuts for the overall defense department...and that meant cuts to the Marine Corps band.

There is not a more controversial or stressful issue in my opinion than the political slugfests that take place over band requests for their participation in parades from U.S. congressional politicians, former Marine generals, or from the major media cable networks for their morning TV shows...and now the bands were facing not only budget cuts, but personnel cuts as well.

Since the Marine Corps band fell under the Community Relations section...I accompanied the senior officer for the Band (a Chief Warrant Officer) and his senior enlisted (a Master Gunnery Sergeant) down to Quantico Marine Corps base as they made their case in front of a Marine Corps general that oversaw the decision process of the budget and personnel cuts.

They put up a valiant fight...but while the 'band' motivates Marines and the American public, the Marine Corps is primarily a warfighting institution....and with even the warfighters getting impacted by the budget and personnel cuts, the band couldn't win the argument that they be 'spared from the budget and personnel cuts' while everyone else took 'hits' as well.

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It was not my idea, but the first time it took place was during my time in Community Relations...it was called 'Marine Week'.

Marine Week was a week of events held in one chosen city in the United States each year. It was created based upon the U.S. Navy's success with 'Fleet Week'.

With 'Fleet Week', like in places such as New York, thousands of members of the U.S. Navy would show the local citizens naval equipment and participate in 'round-table discussions' while 'taking in' the city.

I never understood why, when the Marine Corps was doing this, they had to pay thousands to the local city government agencies for services such as security.

The Marine Week concept is a great idea to share what the Marine Corps is all about with cities across the United States and for local veterans and citizens to meet and talk with Marines...but the Marine Corps shouldn't have to pay cities for that honor (in my opinion).

There should be one city selected every year by the Marine Corps for not only 'Marine Week' to take place, but for all annual conferences that are held and paid for by the Marines Corps, like the annual United States Marine Corps Public Affairs conference...and it should also be highly recommended to the Marine Veteran organizations to hold their conferences in that same city.

If 'Marine Week' and about 20 or more conferences are held in one city over the course of a year...the economic impact for the city by way of hotel stays and tourism should far out way any cost the city would endure by hosting 'Marine Week'.

* * * * *

Back when I was a young officer, I was offered the opportunity to attend a class being given by the Commanding Officer of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina.

It was a class about getting promoted and this 'two star' Major General showed us every one of his evaluations up on the 'big screen' ...and some of them weren't good.

What I took away from his presentation was not to let one bad evaluation make you think you can't make a 'comeback' in the Marine Corps regarding getting promoted.

At this point in my career, since being denied promotion to Lieutenant Colonel on my first opportunity, I had contacted the manpower/personnel division to ask if after 17 years of service if I would have to leave...they told me that everyone gets reviewed for promotion twice and that would put me over the 18-year mark of service, I could then stay until I reached 20 years of service for retirement.

So, with every promotion board, a Marine's promotion package is assigned to a 'briefer' that will make your case before the board as to whether they should vote for you to make it to the next rank...and I don't know if on my first promotion board for Lieutenant Colonel if my briefer suggested maybe I needed a little more observation time...but with a 1% chance of being selected on the second time around...I was selected.

After being informed of the news, I called those that I had worked for and still had phone numbers for to thank them...and I stopped at a liquor store on the way home to buy some champagne to celebrate with my wife.

I came home and left two silver oakleafs, the rank of a U.S. Marine Lieutenant Colonel, on top of my wife's dresser and waited for her to notice; and when she did...this was one of the highlights of my marriage and family life.

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"Hey Stewie, congrats on picking up 05...I'm going to need you to take over the media section for a year and then deploy to Afghanistan for six months on the back end of I MEF's next rotation to RC-South...you'll then return to Camp Pendleton to head up the (public affairs) consolidation as the I MEF PAO," Colonel Chris Hughes, the

Executive Assistant to the Director of Marine Corps Public Affairs told me in May of 2011.[146]

"Roger that Sir," I quickly and happily responded.[147]

To better explain what that all meant:

1. '05' is a reference to being selected to the fifth Marine Corps officer rank of Lieutenant Colonel.
2. The media section is Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs, Media Branch.
3. I MEF is a reference to the senior operational unit for the Marine Corps at Camp Pendleton, CA ...orated as the '1st Marine Expeditionary Force'. Where I was going in Afghanistan would be referred to as their 'forward' (FWD) command.
4. RC-South is a reference to the Regional Command South-West (RC-SW), one of the four Regional Commands in Afghanistan that was commanded by and operated mostly by U.S. Marines (and was affectionately referred to as 'Marine-A-Stan' by some senior leaders). It covers both Kandahar and Helmand provinces.
5. The 'consolidation' is a reference to an order the Commandant of the Marine Corps had just signed authorizing Public Affairs to bring all its personnel located at its major bases under one roof vice Public Affairs personnel being 'de-consolidated' and spread out across the various units and subordinate commands.

* * * * *

"I'm not a good leader"

Yup, I said it to four U.S. Marine Corps Captains that worked in the media section I just took over...and these

[146] I had picked up a new nickname, 'Stewie' from the sitcom series 'Family Guy' cartoon character.

[147] This was the beginning of the end of my marriage and family life...which will be explained more in detail later.

were three men and one woman of perfect physical and mental DNA.

They had just gone through two previous bosses…one tried to kill himself, the other decided not to 'get into the flow of the river he jumped into' and 'paddled against the current', i.e., he didn't like his boss, so he came up with reasons why the taskings he received shouldn't be executed.

These Marines didn't need a 'gung-ho' new leader coming in and issuing directives…they had been surviving on their own and nothing had failed.

Public Affairs can be an individual sport 'so-to-speak' and I knew these four Marines were brilliant…and they mostly wanted to be left alone to do their job.[148]

The first thing I instituted were the same fundamentals I learned while working at the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Press Desk…assigning accounts and backups and weekly 'briefing cards' with talking points for each account.[149]

Additionally, since currently there was no 4G, 5G, etc. for the cell phones Marines were issued, referred to as a 'Blackberry', I made the morning email of media clips (The Daily Media Report) entirely a 'text' email so it could be downloaded and read easily while the Marines that worked at the Pentagon 'carpooled' their way to work.

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When I moved into the head media position at Headquarters Marine Corps, the current Director of Public Affairs at the time was Colonel Brian Salas.

Now, the famous U. S. Marine General, James N. Mattis (whom I've mentioned before in the chapter 'Lockdown got

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[148] At my going away event…and this is one of the proudest moments of my life…these Marines told me I 'was a good leader'.

[149] A backup for an 'account' means that when the primary account holder for an account, say Manpower, is on vacation, there needs to be a 'backup' on call and somewhat familiar with the account to 'fill-in'.

fired') had received the callsign 'CHAOS' earlier in his career ...the acronym meant, "Colonel Has Another Outstanding Solution" ...this callsign was received because some Marine leaders are constantly coming up with creative new ideas...and I will admit at times, I was one of these officers.

So, what does all this mean? It means that at times you can work for a leader and get 100 tasks a day, 100 ideas a day.[150]

Are you feeling overwhelmed yet?

Well, the best thing you can do when you work for someone that gives you multiple 'long term' tasks a day is to walk into their office and lay it out for them..."Sir/Ma'am, these are all of the tasks you have given me (and my Marines) ...I'm working 24/7 on these, but there is only so much time the day...so, I need you to prioritize these for me...because we're not going to be able to get these 1,000 tasks done all at the same time.[151]

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"Do you think we should endorse this...get behind this 'movement'? Colonel Salas asked me while I stood in the doorway of his office.

It took me about 15 seconds to think about it...and then I said, "Yes, let's do it, I like it."

This was during the time of celebrities being asked and accepting invitations to attend the annual Marine Corps

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[150] My 8x5 yellow paper pad every day would have a line down the middle with tasks written on every line, on both sides of the divider...with more shit to do on the next page.

[151] As I mentioned in the chapter 'Selling out for Iraq' that I'm a fan of the Raiders...I remembered when head coach John Gruden was working for owner Al Davis...and he would have to put together presentations when the 'boss' had ideas that were not logical in the execution faze (if that makes sense). So, Gruden would go into Davis' office and have a logical discussion...maybe you win, maybe you lose, but at least you let the boss know the workload that you have been tasked with.

Ball that is held on or near the birthday of the founding of the Marine Corps every November 10th.

This blitz of celebrities being asked by Marines to be their date was initially started by singer/actor Justin Timberlake and actress Mila Kunis...both of whom dominated entertainment media at the time.

We then received a request from NBC News Pentagon reporter and producer, Courtney Kube, to appear on an MSNBC cable news show called 'Live with Tamron Hall'.

I offered this opportunity to all four press officers, but they all declined...so, I prepared my own Public Affairs Guidance (i.e., talking points, etc.) and took the Sergeant of the office with me to the interview.[152]

At first, I seemed to stumble out of the gates with the first question, but Ms. Hall, somewhat befuddled by my initial response about not being able to get tickets to the 'Ball' because everyone was now wanting to attend the Marine Corps Balls (and I was getting calls from relatives I'd hadn't heard from in years) (Reference #39) ...she realized I was joking, and the interview continued, and it was great.[153]

I just kept trying to remember to take a breath after every question...and to keep my answers to 15 to 30 seconds.

After this, the press officers didn't turn down opportunities to appear on camera LIVE again and morale of our team improved 100%.

Lastly, Mr. Timberlake, after attending his first Marine Corps Ball made a statement by way of a blogpost after the event that described how awestruck he was to attend and

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[152] Remember my uniform mistake at Camp Lejeune for the Telephone book cover wearing the same ribbon and medal ...I'd learned my lesson and took someone with me to overlook my uniform before the interview.

[153] This was probably the one and only time my kids watched me on TV...and they still remember it to this day as a positive experience reflecting my job and career.

what he saw and experienced...it was awesome! (Reference #40)

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The creation of the Public Affairs Playbook was the idea of Colonel Salas...otherwise known as the PA Playbook.

At first, it was a compilation of talking points on the major subjects relating to the Marine Corps that was being reported on in the media...and then it morphed into this broad ranging, expanded list of talking points on about 20 or more subjects or issues.

The Operations section at Headquarters Marine Corps, which controls intelligence and operational issues had a monopoly on 'power and control' of time and attention of the leadership...and when the PA Playbook became a 'hit', I was threatened by the 'Operations' section's Chief of Staff that if I didn't run all my talking points by them first, he was going to 'kill me'.

You see, at the Department of Defense level, Public Affairs is the most powerful section at the Pentagon because it's political...and by that, I mean, the spokesperson is usually a political appointee by the Presidential administration and coordinates with the White House for messaging. At the military service level, i.e., the Army, Marines, Air Force, and Navy...the most powerful section is the 'Operations Section'.

Eventually, the distribution and weekly pace of the PA Playbook would become a 'rubber stamp' by the 'Operations Section' and reach Retired Marines (including the relatives of my Press Officers) ...everyone seemed to be happy to receive the 'product' and my Press Officers became even more motivated about the work we were doing.

Marine Corps Public Affairs had taken a major role with the leadership of the Marine Corps...and definitely had a 'seat' at the 'table' during staff meetings.

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Captain Kendra Hardesty, one of four U.S. Marine Corps media officers working in the media branch (not including me; I was the director of the branch) ...took a query from a reporter about a video that had been posted to YouTube of Marines in Afghanistan urinating on a Taliban corpse.

It took her about five minutes to draft out a response and get it cleared with the Executive Assistant of Public Affairs, Colonel Chris Hughes, before she responded to the reporter and then all hell broke loose.

Captain Hardesty met me as I walked back into the U.S. Marine Corps Division of Public Affairs office spaces at the Pentagon...I was just returning from a meeting.

Everything after that regarding a 'Public Affairs' perspective (or strategy) fell in line with Hardesty's initial statement, i.e., 'this is not reflective of Marine Corps values' & this is now ... 'under investigation'. (Reference #41)

Not long after the Marine Urination Scandal had calmed down (regarding media coverage), photos of a Marine Sniper unit in Afghanistan posing with a flag resembling the logo of the 'Nazi SS' surfaced (Reference #42) ...and I responded with the same Public Relations strategy as the Urination scandal.

This appeared to be 'two strikes' for the current Commandant of the Marine Corps, then General James F. Amos with then Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta.

General Amos also didn't help himself with an NPR interview he did in which he further 'dug himself in' with the Secretary...and so in discussions with his personal Public Affairs Officer, we recommended General Amos go on a speaking tour to reinforce Marine Corps values and invite the media to every event...and he didn't get fired.

* * * * *

"What's with the eyeball fucking around here," the new general in charge of Marine Corps Public Affairs, Brigadier General Paul Kennedy, asked me.

General Kennedy was referencing the experience of walking around the Pentagon.

"Oh yeah, well, 'welcome to the Pentagon' ...you see Sir, most folks around here are either (1), just completely pissed off because this entire building is a cesspool of negativity, (2), they think they're better than you, or (3), because they work for a higher-ranking officer than you...they feel like they don't have to take shit from anyone below their boss," I told him.

General Kennedy had just arrived from a tour in Afghanistan's Helmand Province and was one of, if not the fastest, general officers to be thrown into Public Affairs and start executing it safely and wisely.[154]

When the Commandant of the Marine Corps got ambushed during the NPR interview, General Kennedy and I were dispatched to NPR to talk about what happened from our perspective.

For the trip to NPR, located in the center of Washington DC, I decided we would travel via the metro train...and experiencing riding on the metro with a general officer in uniform was not my best decision...and so Kennedy told me next time to request car service.

General Kennedy also took me with him into the Commandant's office with the Assistant Commandant also present and said to them, "This is my guy," as he pointed to me...he did the same at his 'meet and greet' evening

[154] I will give an honorable mention to a previous director of Public Affairs, Lieutenant General John F. Sattler and to someone who never served as the director of Marine Corps Public Affairs, but I feel he mastered the Art...Lt. Gen. Lawrence D. Nicholson. It should also be noted that none of these three generals made it to the 'four star' rank...mostly because, in my opinion, they were too popular with the press.

gathering of the Pentagon Press Corps not long after his arrival.



U.S. Marine Corps General Paul Kennedy (center) and Colonel Chris Hughes (right) just before my promotion ceremony to Lieutenant Colonel in December of 2011 at the Pentagon.

Working for General Kennedy was one of the most fun and happy times of my life...also because, being the head of Headquarters Marine Corps Media Section was my dream job.

* * * * *

"Public Affairs is more of an 'art' ...than a 'science'."

That was the opening statement from U.S. Marine Colonel David A. Lapan as he conducted a PME (Primary Military

Education) to the four press officers that worked in the Headquarters Marine Corps Media Branch.[155]

Lapan was the first U.S. Marine Public Affairs officer to become the director of the Pentagon/Department of Defense Public Affairs (i.e., the office I worked in for the ATT-TRI-BUTION chapter) ...and I'd asked him to come and talk to the press officers about 'not giving up on a story'.

When you receive an inquiry from a member of the national media, the first thing you need to know is their deadline and if it's a newspaper, what their deadline is for 'going to print', if it's a television news program...what their cutoff time is before their show 'airs' to update them with any additional information.

For example, you can get a media query from a reporter for Marine Corps Times with a deadline of Wednesday, but you know they don't send the paper to the printing press until Friday night...so, if you need to ask for more time, you'll likely get it.

Sometimes you're not able to reach down into the depths of the Marine Corps and pull out the data requested on time...and if you do, and it is used in the reporting, it could be used out of context if you don't provide that context.[156]

You have the option to add information to the response that may help the reporter to understand your organizations (or whoever you are working for at the time) point of view ...you can also offer up an SME (subject matter expert) or a high-ranking officer to sit-down and interview to give the reporter the context. Most times

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[155] I've already named Captain Hardesty, the other three press officers, in alphabetical order, were Captain Brian Block, Captain Kevin Schultz, and Captain Gregory Wolf.

[156] I was never afraid of informing those that I requested data from that the Commandant or a general officer higher ranking than the person they worked for was aware of and tracking this issue to get them to meet the deadline. I also never stopped calling and emailing those I needed data or explanations from until the deadline had passed or our opportunity to impact the reporting was over.

these offers are accepted because they add to the 'news value' of the reporting.

Lastly, and due to the growth of the internet, it was no longer just a fight to the deadline or when the cable news network finally aired their reporting.

I told my press officers they had 24 hours after a controversial report was published (or aired) to try and add information and/or messaging...as well as to try and get a correction issued.

It seemed like it was easier to get an article posted on-line updated versus an article published in the newspaper or a television news report.

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While you could encounter media just walking down the halls of the Pentagon or hanging out at Dunkin Donuts, before a press conference was to take place by the senior leadership of the Marine Corps, I would take a walk down through the 'press pit' located in the hallway behind the Department of Defense Press Desk.

As a matter of ethics and professionalism, a reporter will not provide to you in advance their questions...but that doesn't stop you from asking them, "what's on your mind today," or "what are some of the key areas you are expecting to hear about," or "what information would like to hear more about today?"

I found the last two questions I just listed to be the most effective way to solicit information out of reporters that wanted to make sure they got the information they were seeking for the report they would put together after the press conference.

After all, if they didn't get a good soundbite, their reporting may not get published or 'aired' on TV.[157]

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"You want to call me a coward? You want to fight me? ...let's fight!"

That was an email I received early one morning just after I stepped on the Washington DC Metro train on my way to work at the Pentagon...I forwarded it to General Kennedy who told me not to respond.

The email was from McClatchy news service reporter Jonathan S. Landay...and he was pissed because I made a post to social media about him 'leaving the battlefield' during a battle that took place on September 8, 2009, near the Afghan village of Ganjgal.

Landay had been at that location that day along with (then) U.S. Marine Corporal Dakota L. Meyer.

Dakota would eventually be recommended for, and receive, the Medal of Honor for his actions that day...which included putting Landay on a helicopter about midway through the battle.

Upon returning to the United States, and news spreading of Dakota's heroic actions...Landay, apparently, sought to team up with Dakota to write a book about that day.

Dakota didn't choose Landay to 'team up' with to write his book and the next thing you know there is a published article by Landay questioning the authenticity of Dakota's Medal of Honor citation. (Reference #43)

As I have written about before in this book, some generals I've encountered would rather be 'shot at' in a combat zone than face a reporter from the national media...and here was this kid, Dakota, fresh off the battlefield with no media

[157] Also, 90% of the time a Pentagon reporter approaches you for comment, they already know the answer from an anonymous source....they are just looking for an official comment for the record.

experience, getting taken advantage of by Landay (in my opinion). (Reference #44)

I did make a visit to the Washington DC offices of McClatchy to speak with Landay's bosses before his reporting was published...but they didn't seem to care what Landay was doing.

So, did I know what I was doing when I made the social media post? ...did I hope it would 'trigger' Landay and give him a little bit of his own medicine?

Yes...yes, I did!

Previously, I had held in high regard the reporting by McClatchy on the Iraq war, but letting Landy do this to Dakota Myer...I lost respect for them.

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As the head of all media operations for the Marine Corps, from time to time, a Marine at one of the bases would start speaking to the media about a controversial topic.

If the Marine continued to talk to the media and the story gained national attention, I would make a call down to the command of that Marine and ask them one question, "Who authorized this Marine to speak to the media (or to speak publicly on the issue while they represented the Marine Corps, wore their uniform on camera, etc.)?"

Now, the next thing that would happen is the Marine would be contacted by the base's Staff Judge Advocate (i.e., lawyer) to inform them of their legal rights and consequences if they continue to speak on Marine Corps issues without authorization.

Bottom line: as an individual Marine...if you try to take on the entire (and unlimited) Public Affairs assets of the Marine Corps and the Department of Defense (not to mention the government lawyers) ...you're probably not going to 'win' and you may lose your career in the process.

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I thought he was going to throw me out of his office...but he didn't.

Veteran Pentagon reporter David Martin of CBS News had been asking me about the study underway during this time regarding opening infantry and other specialty jobs to female Marines.

For the past couple of months, Martin had been coming into my office asking about another issue that I was specifically directed not to release any information on...the look he gave me each time I told him I had 'nothing for him' was that of telling me not just that he thought I was incompetent, but lazy as well.[158]

So, when I had information I could share about the 'women in the military' study he was asking about...I went down to his office and shut the door behind me.

I told him that the study had found there were no jobs in the military that women couldn't do...but that with certain jobs, like infantry, their bodies would break down faster than their male counterparts (and that's when I thought he was going to throw me out of his office).

You see, the 20 years of service to reach retirement is actually a pretty good gauge for most military service members because, and this has been documented, their bodies age about 10 years more than the rest of the population after two decades of service.

It wasn't just about the female body breaking down before they reached the 20-year mark if they were in the infantry specialty for all those years...it was more of a concern about overall health care costs that would come out of the military 'services' budget.

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[158] A higher classification than Top Secret is 'compartmentalized' information...and if you leak that information, not only will it be easy to find out who leaked it, you will have your head ripped off and someone will shit down your neck.

There are three types of junior officers...and I'm paraphrasing here:

The first type of junior officer will receive a task and not ask any questions before they 'head off' to complete it.[159]

The second type of junior officer will ask about three questions and then 'head off' to complete the task.

The third type of junior officer will ask questions and continue to ask questions...and never even get to executing the task.

So, you need to know your personnel's strengths and weaknesses.

At some point, the security book review process shifted from the Marine Corps New York Public Affairs office to Headquarters Marine Corps Media section...and, for me, it would take me a month to read a book.[160]

I had a stepdaughter living with us at the time that could read a 3-inch book of hundreds of pages overnight and retain it all...so, I asked my press officers if any one of them had that ability and one did.

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I had gotten so good at giving tours of the Pentagon, my bosses knew it...and my wife knew it.

Entrance into the Pentagon is on the 2nd floor, so, every tour would begin there by walking past the portraits of

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[159] Unfortunately, this was me...I should have asked a couple of questions.

[160] The book review process for the military is for those that held classified ratings of 'secret' or higher to ensure that no classified information is published...it's not to do the publishers job of correcting grammar. To me, this is an outdated requirement because there is no requirement for former military service members when they write OP-Eds, Blog posts, and speeches, as well as conducting television interviews. When you leave military service and you held a classified rating, you sign a piece of paper acknowledging that you will not release the classified information you have had access to...so why do we still need to have this 'book review' requirement?

past Secretaries of Defense and I'd make a joke about the dangerous hot dogs being sold in the center courtyard that reportedly had/has Soviet missiles pointed at it.[161]

Then I would make sure to walk down the U.S. Army corridors dedicated to some of their famous Generals, like 'Eisenhower' and 'Marshall'.

Not sure why there are no U.S. Air Force corridors dedicated to the Tuskegee Airmen or Brigadier General James M. Stewart (you know, the actor, "It's a Wonderful Life"). And for the U.S. Navy, a corridor dedicated to 'Fleet Admiral' Chester W. Nimitz (you know, the battle of Midway).

The Marine Corps really doesn't (or didn't) have any corridors dedicated to a Marines career, but if it was up to me, I would dedicate the corridors under the decorative control of the Marine Corps to past Marines such as Lieutenant General Chesty Puller, the Krulaks, (Lieutenant General Victor H. "Brute" Krulak & his son, General Charles C. Kulak), Sgt. Major Dan Daley, Maj. General Smedley Butler, and General James Mattis.

After 9-11, I would take visitors to the memorial located at the site of the attack and then walk down the Marine Corps corridor that has portraits of past leaders.

An interesting observation if you sign up for and receive an official tour of the Pentagon is that the actual tour guides of the Pentagon will give their entire tour walking backwards while orating a script they had to memorize.

The best tip I can give you should you decide to take a tour of the Pentagon is to wear some good walking shoes...because you're going to be walking a lot!

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[161] I would test myself on my way into work to know the name of every past Secretary of Defense as I walked by their portraits. There is only one past secretary of Defense that has 'two' portraits...and that would be Donald Rumsfeld because he served twice in that role under two different presidents.

When friends of my wife would visit the Washington DC area, I would be tasked out for a Friday evening tour of the Pentagon after work (that included a stop at the Pentagon gift shop).

One evening, I was giving a tour to the parents of a Marine that had been killed in combat...and we were passing by the U.S. Army Chief of Staff's office.

An Army Major came running out of the door and into the hallway almost knocking us over...and before he headed down the hallway to wherever he was going, he looked back and noticed the 'Gold Star' lapel pin on one of the parents.



A photo I took inside the U.S. Army Chief of Staff's office of a historic globe used to plot tactics going back to WWI.

The Major immediately stopped and calmed down...and then he invited us into the Chief of Staff's office for a tour.

He didn't ask us to wait so he could ask 'the boss' ...he just ushered us in.

I've been in the U.S. Marine Corps' leadership offices, and it is nothing compared to the historical artifacts that remain in the Army's Chief of Staff's office.

I was taken aback at the actions of the Major and his immediate 'about-face' upon seeing the gold star lapel pin...with all the 'busy' work at the Pentagon you can get 'caught up in' during the workday, it was humbling to see such a priority take place for those that have given the ultimate sacrifice.

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If you remember from earlier in this chapter, I was scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan for the last six months of a one-year deployment for a U.S. Marine command from Camp Pendleton.

The unit, referred to as I MEF (FWD) was completing their pre-deployment workups and I'd been hearing about trouble within the Public Affairs unit.[162]

The senior Public Affairs Enlisted Marine, (who will be known as) Master Sergeant XXX had been effectively 'setting-up' the senior Public Affairs Officer to fail.

Master Sergeant XXX apparently had a previous relationship with the I MEF (FWD) General, Major General Charles M. Gurganus...the depths to I wasn't exactly sure at that time.

What is known about Gurganus is that he had a reputation for having an 'open marriage' aboard Camp Pendleton and he (apparently) married his previous public affairs photographer...a U.S. Navy Sailor.

Gurganus only had two specific Marines he requested be assigned to his command for this upcoming combat deployment...Master Sergeant XXX and another Enlisted female Marine that would work out of the 'Operations and Training' section (this Marine took care of Gurganus' weigh-ins and fitness tests to ensure he was recorded as having met U.S. Marine Corps height and weight standards, passed fitness tests, etc. ...even though it was obvious the general was overweight and out of shape).

Gurganus also selected submissive military Aides and his Chief of Staff because he knew he could dominate them regarding any thoughts they might have of standing up to him and his actions...specifically regarding his relationship with Master Sergeant XXX.

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[162] I MEF FWD=One Marine Expeditionary Force Forward. The forward means the unit is deployed from the United States to a war zone.

So, it wasn't really a surprise when Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs was notified that the only impediment to direct contact between Gurganus and Master Sergeant XXX, that being the senior Public Affairs Officer, had been fired just before I MEF FWD was to begin deploying to Afghanistan's Helmand Province.

While I had been warned about taking this deployment regarding Gurganus...I had still forgotten to get that fucking tattoo on my forehead reminding me not to deploy again.

I viewed the firing of the senior Public Affairs Officer that I was slated to replace after six months of the one-year deployment as an opportunity to get more combat deployment time than six months...and I wanted to get back to the 'shit' ...so I asked to leave as soon as possible to join the deployment.

So, I MEF FWD deployed in early 2012 with Master Sergeant XXX put in charge of the Public Affairs unit...a unit that had two junior lieutenants along with a handful of enlisted combat correspondents.

I would join the unit at the end of March of that year.

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Personally, I was staying in a hotel sometimes during the work week because when I would arrive home, my wife would be so starved for attention and conversation...she could keep me up all night nudging me in bed to make sure I was awake to hear what she was saying.

On the nights she would keep me up without sleep, the next day at work, I would tell the office that I was going to go 'work out' and get some lunch...but I would really go to the underground Pentagon pool and laydown on one of the pool chairs and put a towel over my head and get about an hour or so of sleep. I was not the only one that did this.

I had uprooted my wife from the Central Coast of California...one of the top ten places to live in the world according to most of those types of surveys.

She left her friends, family, etc. to come to a town in the state of Maryland where she didn't know anyone or have any relatives nearby.

During marriage counseling I explained that I felt somewhat 'down' because the two dogs we had were tearing up the new deck I'd just rebuilt, and they were shitting and pissing all over my backyard lawn...ruining it.



The two partners in crime.

Lastly, the nerve pain in my neck and lower back due to bulging discs continued to worsen and I continued to take more and more pain medicine...I would notice in family photos that my eyes would be tiny little dots (i.e., dilated pupils).

Administrative Action
(Navy/Marine Corps form 10274)
Helmand Province, Afghanistan
June 27, 2012

"As a result of repeated Inspector General investigations into the Regional Command-Southwest Public Affairs shop, I hereby request the termination of my duties to this command."

E-mail to my (then) wife from Regional Command-Southwest, Helmand Province, Afghanistan.
October 29, 2012

"I'm literally trying to stave off a serious fucking disaster. 60 MINUTES and Laura Logan are trying to come in here and basically do a 'failure story' regarding the leadership here allowing the Taliban's attack that killed two Marines and destroyed an entire squadron of Harrier aircraft ...which was the worst attack since the Vietnam war Tet Offensive. ...I just don't want to handle this wrong as a PAO nor do I want to give bad advice to leadership here on how best to handle this. There are a few famous PA disasters that have had a strategic impact on the Marine Corps. Anyhow, too many PAO's eager to give their endorsement to a story that is sure to suck ...but I don't know how to turn it off and even if I do, they can do the story anyway...which may suck more."

(PAO=Public Affairs Officer, PA=Public Affairs)

Because America Wants A Marine Corp

When I arrived at the Regional Command-Southwest (RC-SW) in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, it was clear to me that the two junior officers were not 'leading' the office...Master Sergeant XXX was.

It was like two little dogs following around and thinking a big cat, Master Sergeant XXX, was their mother.

As briefly mentioned in the last chapter, the Master Sergeant personal relationship with Major General Charles M. Gurganus gave her access to the Commanding General at any time...which the two junior Lieutenants didn't have.

Their daily routine went something like this...and mind you, this is in a war zone.

7:30am – Arrive/Check-into the office and then immediately leave for breakfast.

9:30am – Return from breakfast and then immediately leave for the gym.

11:30am – Return from the gym and depart for lunch.

1:30pm – Return from lunch and check their social media.

2:00pm – Depart to the gym for their second workout of the day.

4:00pm – Return from the gym and hang out until around 6pm when they would leave the office for the day.

* * * * *

"Who's that?"

"Oh Sir, that's your interpreter, we call him 'Pop Pa' because he's like everyone's grandpa."

That was the conversation I had with one of the Marines in the Public Affairs office after I looked at a man in his mid-70s sleeping at his desk throughout the day.

The interpreter I inherited, while loved by the office, could verbally translate 'Pashto', the dominate language of southwestern Afghanistan...but he wasn't very good...nor did he have a work ethic...nor could he translate text while using Microsoft Word.

So, I fired him in my first couple of weeks...this didn't endear me to the Public Affairs Marines that had been working with him for the past couple of months...and you could say this was the beginning of me 'shaking things up' upon my arrival.

I'd heard about an interpreter that was very talented and was living aboard our base, Camp Leatherneck, but had lost his security clearance due to a bankruptcy back in the United States when a fast-food establishment he owned failed...and since Public Affairs doesn't deal in classified information, this was a 'good fit' so-to-speak.

He went by the nickname 'Mo' and he could not only verbally translate 'Pashto', he could also translate 'Dari' (which is the other main language of Afghanistan) and 'Urdo' (which is a language of a nearby country, Pakistan.

Mo's computer skills to translate our press releases into Dari and Pashto became a 'force multiplier'. Mo was the only person I served with that I 'looked up' and met with after I retired.

I also began my daily visits with my 'Afghan Partners' on the adjoining base, referred to as 'Camp Shorabak' ...nobody from the Public Affairs office had visited the Afghan military's Public Affairs office since they'd arrived at Camp Leatherneck a couple of months prior to my arrival.

I loved visiting with my Afghan partners...their Public Affairs Office was made up of an Army Lieutenant Colonel, a Master Sergeant, and a few military correspondents.

I always looked forward to eating Afghan rice and bread with my 'partners' in their 'chow hall' when I would

visit...Afghan rice and bread was the best food I'd ever experienced in my life.



This photo was taken during a battlefield circulation on my previous deployment of an Afghan cook preparing the rice and bread.

The white rice had raisins and carrot strips along with a Lamb broth/stock poured over it...the Afghan flour/bread had just a remarkably great taste unlike anything I've ever experienced in the United States or elsewhere.

I would also eat breakfast in their living quarters on some days; they would cook eggs with heavy salt on a hot plate, served with bread...I got food poisoning a couple of times, but it was worth it to eat real food versus the U.S. military chow hall on Camp Leatherneck.

* * * * *

Every day around 5pm, there would be a 'command brief' where each section for the command would provide an

update...there would be days where the Public Affairs section didn't have to brief; but I still had to watch and listen to the brief from my office...and I expected the rest of the Marines in the Public Affairs office to listen to it.

I started hearing music coming from outside my office and so I went to investigate where it was coming from...turns out, one of the female officers was dancing with two enlisted Marines while Master Sgt. XXX stood by and watched.

I shut that shit down in about two seconds and let them know they had their priorities fucked up...and they needed to unfuck themselves immediately and watch the command brief.

I would call and check in with Colonel Chris Hughes, still the executive assistant/deputy at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs...and I vented to him about the situation I walked into at Camp Leatherneck with the officers in the office following Master Sergeant XXX around.

I told him it was hard to 'wrestle' the command and leadership of the office away from Master Sergeant XXX when she was walking around Camp Leatherneck like a one star general due to her personal relationship and support from Major General Gurganus.

So, Hughes called into the office to give a 'pep talk' to the officers and try to explain to them that they were not being leaders...and that they needed to start using initiative and focusing on the mission.

Well, the first thing the two junior officers did was to inform Master Sergeant XXX...and that was the cause of my first Inspector General complaint and investigation.

Additionally, when I arrived at my next staff meeting, my seating had been moved from the middle of the meeting room to the very end...so far to the end I was placed behind the audio-visual screens that the command brief was being presented on.

This was also the beginning of Major General Gurganus routinely 'shotgun blasting' me verbally during the staff meetings to embarrass, degrade, and humiliate me into submission of his unethical and unprofessional relationship with Master Sergeant XXX...in a war zone![163]

* * * * *

I walked into the Public Affairs office aboard Camp Leatherneck one afternoon to find only a local Afghan construction worker atop a ladder fixing a light fixture.

As my eyes moved to the bottom of the ladder, I notice one of my junior officer's loaded M-16...he apparently had left it behind when he went somewhere.

When I met with the junior officer to discuss his lack of judgement in leaving his weapon behind...I had also been in receipt of a request from the G3/Operations-section for someone from Public Affairs to take a seat in the Command Operations Center (COC) overnight.

So, I informed the Lieutenant of his new 'overnight' duties.

This was the basis for the second Inspector General complaint filed against me.

Master Sergeant XXX got one junior officer to file the first IG complaint...and now she manipulated the second junior officer to file the second IG complaint for being assigned night-watch duties while on a combat deployment.

Master Sergeant XXX got the second junior officer so worked up he burst into my office after his first night of working in the Command Operations Center. He was holding his finger on the trigger of his M-16, and he then

[163] Gurganus was the type of General that loved the sound of his own voice and would regularly share his personal political views with the staff during these meetings. For example, leading up to the 2012 Presidential election, he would inform the staff that President Barack Obama would NOT be reelected and that we would be seeing some good changes coming from that and how things were being 'run' in Afghanistan. President Obama won reelection.

proceeded to complain about the harsh realities he was having to deal with regarding his new duties…I told him to go see the base psychologist if he was having problems.[164]

At this point, I'd fucking had it with being under constant investigation and the way I was being treated by the General and the staff.

I didn't really mind 'being on my own island' regarding dealing with the general and the staff…but constantly being under investigation was a tactic being used by the General and Master Sergeant XXX in order to have something to respond with should I go public with my perception of their relationship.

If I was such a 'bad' Public Affairs Officer and/or leader of the Public Affairs office, then send me home…and that's why I submitted an Administrative Action (aka AA form) to be sent home.[165]

I not only provided a copy of the AA form to the Operations Section, but I also provided a copy to the Camp Leatherneck Inspector General, U.S. Marine Colonel Paul Ozmer. The Inspector General told me that if I was sent home, my replacement would face the same attacks and environment that I was experiencing.

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[164] About a year or so later, I would overhear this officer bitching about orders he had given to Marines for duty at Marine Corps Base 29 Palms (one of the worst duty stations for Marines that is located in a California desert) and how he couldn't believe they were complaining about the assignment…and that wasn't even in a combat/war zone.

[165] I might have feared being fired and/or embarrassed on a national stage while at Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs…but I no longer cared about that. This command lacked vigilance. The command was a 'sitting duck' to the 'shit show' that was about to happen, and I not only wanted no part of it …I wanted it known that at some point, I stood up and said, 'I want no part of what's going on here'. I'm not a shrinking violet like all these other staff members that are looking the other way for a good evaluation, their next promotion, or the Bronze Star they hoped to be awarded at the end of the tour for never leaving the base.

My AA form apparently got lost in the mail (so-to-speak) and I never received a response regarding it.

I firmly believe Gurganus knew that after firing his first Public Affairs Officer for this deployment (in order to get any obstruction between himself and Master Sergeant XXX out of the way), firing a second U.S. Marine Lieutenant Colonel would cause interest into what was going on with his command.

I was eventually counseled by Gurganus with the results of the Inspector General investigations (but never provided a copy of the complaints or the investigations) ...I was told to not be such a 'hard ass' to my Marines and to 'take my foot off the gas'. I asked myself, "this was a combat zone, right?

I was also ordered that I could no longer contact Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs...but I wasn't ordered not to send the two lieutenants' home at their six-month mark; and so I did...and I got a 'shit hot' Captain out of the New York Public Affairs office to replace them.

Overall, I felt like the Public Affairs Officer in a very popular satirical cartoon...where the Public Affairs Officer is behind glass in a commander's office, like a fire extinguisher, with a sign nearby that says, "In case of accident, break glass."



I just kept asking myself, "If Master Sergeant XXX is so 'good' and 'competent' ...why keep me around?"

Lastly, the two Inspector General investigations and my counseling were never 'noted' in my evaluations or documented in my permeant record...so, like I said, they just wanted to 'keep their foot on my neck' until the deployment was over.

* * * * *

"You know what ...get the fuck out of my office!"

"Yeah, I'll get out of your office (as I stood up from my chair across his desk to hover over him), but just so we're clear...you ever put out a public affairs release of information without my authority...I'm reporting you to higher command."

That was a discussion I repeatedly had with the United Kingdom (UK) Strategic Communications Officer (aka the 'StratCom' officer), a British Colonel, for Camp Leatherneck.

Only the Public Affairs officer was authorized to make public releases...if Psychological Operations or Strategic Communications wants to put out information to manipulate the local Afghans, they needed to follow their own rules and regulations for doing such...not under the 'cover' of my office or that of the NATO coalition.

To this day, I really have no idea behind the motivation of the UK StratCom officer and the British deputy Commanding General, a one star general, aboard our base for trying to push disinformation to the local populist of Helmand Province in Afghanistan.

I mean, the Chinese were very clear about bribing and buying influence in the east of Afghanistan in relation to raw minerals and materials but the British interest in Helmand Province to this day escapes me.

Throughout my deployment I was challenged by the UK Colonel and our Deputy Brigadier General from the UK seeking to put out misinformation under the 'guise' of official Public Affairs information...and I kept telling those

motherfuckers that if they did it in violation of NATO Public Affairs policy…I was going to have to report them to higher NATO command.[166]

* * * * *

"I can't believe they promoted you to Major," he said.

Was he joking?

No, he wasn't joking and that was Wall Street Journal reporter and book author, Michael M. Phillips.

Phillips and I had crossed paths in Afghanistan previously in 2001…which may or may not have involved me backing him up against a wall after we felt that he 'outed' the location of one of our snipers in his reporting.

I might have also, in 2001 at Camp Rhino…locked him in a warehouse in the aftermath of the Friendly Fire incident described in the chapter, "Lockdown got fired."

Phillips also attended the media/military boot camp described in an earlier chapter, 'Selling Out For Iraq'.

His comment above was said to me and (at the time) my girlfriend, in the middle of the annual U.S. Marine Corps Public Affairs Conference that was held in Reno, NV in 2005…it was just before I would propose and ask my girlfriend to be my wife.

And did I forget to mention Phillips was also the guest of honor at the conference for the keynote address?

Phillips had returned to Afghanistan in April of 2012 to embed with U.S. Marines for a trip to the southwestern Nimroz Province that borders Iran.

[166] And of course, the British UK colonel who never left the Camp Leatherneck base and played information games with Afghan citizens…was awarded the Bronze Star by Gurganus.

During this trip, the unit Phillips was traveling with was attacked and a U.S. Marine Master Sergeant was killed along with other Marines wounded. (Reference #45)

In the Command Operations Center (aka the COC) back at Camp Leatherneck, they couldn't get ahold of any Marines from the unit immediately following the attack.

They say that you are not supposed to bring (unsecure) cell phones into the Command Operations Center...but on this day I walked my (hacked) iPhone with local Afghan cell phone service into the COC and handed it to the head of operations.

I was able to get Phillips on his cell phone where he was 'hunkered down' with the unit...and he handed his cell phone to the team leader for the operation.

The team leader requested an immediate evacuation due to the impact of the attack on the unit. He was then asked if they had accomplished their mission by the head of Operations...and the answer came back, "no."

The unit leader was told the injured would be medevacked and then ordered to 'finish' the mission they came there for and then return.[167]

Upon Phillips return to Camp Leatherneck, I made sure to personally greet him coming off the aircraft...and since he wasn't in the normal 'pipeline' so-to-speak of a Marine unit after experiencing combat...I took him over to a psychologist for a visit to establish initial psychological (or psychiatric) care in Afghanistan that could continue when he returned to the United States (should he chose to do so).

* * * * *

"Listen, I can't tell you how I know this...but don't do what you say you are going to do...it's not safe."

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[167] One of the first things you are taught in the Marine Corps is that the 'mission' comes first above personal/personnel safety in combat...in training, it's safety first.

That was my phone call with a former U.S. Marine that had become a photographer for the San Diego Union Tribune...his name was Earnie Grafton.

He was pissed at the embed process and delays getting into Camp Rhino, Afghanistan in 2001 after 9-11 and told me he was going to just 'get there' via Iran or another neighboring country.

From what I was becoming aware of at that time...if he did what he said he was going to do...he probably would have gotten captured by the Taliban and held hostage and/or killed.

Thankfully, he listened to me and we were able to get him back to Camp Rhino in a safe manner.

But listen, reporters in a war zone become a Public Affairs Officer's responsibility.

Just like I previously talked about Phillips of the Wall Street Journal...reporters in the war zone are not really part of any 'unit' ...and it doesn't matter if you like them or they like you...and it still doesn't matter even if your leadership hates the media.

So, one night I was on a 'battlefield circulation' down to the south of Helmand Province, Afghanistan, I had a bad feeling about an American reporter working for TIME magazine, Nick McDonell, that decided to transverse one of the most dangerous parts of Afghanistan...the northern parts of Afghanistan's Helmand province...an area referred to as 'Sangin'.

The funny thing about my visit to the south was the U.S. Marine Commander there had once 'leapt' over a table at me during our time at 'The Basic School' after I incited him during a political debate...but that's what happens as

young officers get to know each other and eventually…you learn to see each other's point of view.[168]



That's (then) Lieutenant Philip J. Treglia on the far left and me on the far right at The Basic School in 1997…getting ready to blow some shit up!

The evening I arrived down south, Lieutenant Colonel Treglia had to depart to oversee an Afghan Army attack and so most of the next day, with my 'bad feeling', I worked the phones to try and get the reporter in Sangin a safe place to sleep for the night.

In the end, Major General Gurganus denied the reporter entry to our nearby base for the evening and so an Afghan Army Special Forces unit found the reporter and let him stay with them for the night.

There were complaints filed with the U.S. Embassy from TIME magazine from what I was told.

* * * * *

"I wish I was back home and could put some opium in my tea."

[168] Again, the Basic School is the six-month basic infantry training course completed after U.S. Marine officer bootcamp. All Marine Corps officers must complete this training.

That was my Afghan partner and fellow Lieutenant Colonel talking about how he would usually treat the common cold and/or flu he was going through at the time.

You see, there are no pharmacies in every nearby city in Afghanistan and it appeared opium was used by most Afghans for medicinal purposes...while some were also addicts (against their Muslim religion) and the Taliban 'moved' and stored mass amounts of opium around the region.

Honestly, I was bothered as U.S. military units showed up outside homes of local Afghans, executed a search of their home, basically destroying the interior of their home, only to find a small bag of opium...and then arrested everyone in the family.

* * * * *

During the Civil War, Major General Ulysses S. Grant had one of his (and the Union's) worst days in the early morning hours of April 6, 1862.

Late that night, a fellow 'Union' brigadier general approached Grant with the intent on asking about details for a retreat...but as he approached Grant, he intuitively knew that was not a question to ask.

"Well, we've had the devil's own day, haven't we?" the brigadier general asked of Grant.

Grant responded, "Yes, Lick 'em tomorrow, though," ...and that they did! (Reference #46)

I started using this quote on the left side of a briefing binder I would submit to the general officers I worked for, beginning back in 2009...although I can't remember the exact event in Afghanistan against coalition forces that initiated my first use of this citation.

But, on August 10th, 2012, the U.S. Marine Corps would lose seven of our finest and bravest Marines during two 'friendly fire' incidents...one to the north of our base (Reference #47), the other to the south. (Reference #48)

Both appeared to be premeditated attacks against U.S. forces in Afghanistan by Afghan military and police.

So, while Americans thought we would be 'greeted as liberators' and 'looked out for' by the Afghans we worked with...that was not always how it went.

* * * * *

I was walking by one of the Afghanistan Army guards aboard Camp Shorabak one morning and noticed he was trying to 'unjam' his M-16 rifle...so I offered to help him.

Turns out, the commanding general of Camp Shorabak, Afghan National Army Major General Sayed Malouk had taken the firing pin out of their weapons apparently in a decision to avoid another 'green on blue' or 'friendly fire' incident in which Afghan security forces turned their guns on U.S. military personnel.

General Malouk was an Afghan general that I developed a very good and close relationship with...when something bad would happen and they wanted him to talk with the major western media, like the Washington Post's Kevin Sieff for example, or to make a statement on camera...he would always accommodate the request and my coordination of the media engagement.

Major General Gurganus should have been the initiator of these type of requests, but he didn't have the relationship with the Afghans, for example, like Lieutenant General Rodriguez did...it was like he had an apprehension to fully engage.

At the end of my tour...I received a certificate of Appreciation from General Malouk that I value to this day.

* * * * *

I might have mentioned this before, but back in 2009-2010, when I worked for (then) Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez...he would refer to the Marine forces in Helmand Province as 'Marine-A-Stan'.

You see, the Marine Corps had forged our influence with U.S. Central Command to deploy to Afghanistan's Helmand Province as a self-sufficient, combined arms, force of Marines...we brought everything we needed without needing anyone's assistance, meaning, we brought the ground force, an aviation force, a headquarters...and had a support force on standby in nearby allied countries.

Every other U.S. Regional Command in Afghanistan needed another service...such as the Army and the Air Force to work together to complete their mission.

But since the surge of 2009-2010 by U.S. forces into Afghanistan had ended, troop force levels were reduced across the board and the NATO/ISAF leadership was emphatic that the Afghan forces take the lead and take all the risks on the battlefield (for about 90% I would say).

So, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Camp Leatherneck...a once very active U.S. Marine/British UK command...was now reduced to what appeared to me as a 'circle jerk' of power point presentations and staff meetings where folks thought of more ways to fuck things up than improve them.

While the aviation unit was working on their music video to a Britney Spears song (which I didn't approve) (Reference #49) ...the Commanding General was thinking more with his 'little head' than his 'big head'.

Additionally, because the U.S. Marine Colonel in charge of the Headquarters Support Command (mostly dealing with administrative and fitness issues) was such a hard ass (i.e., very fucking vigilant) ...when he went home for his two weeks of leave...they told him not to return.

Major General Gurganus and the head of all ground forces, (then) Major General David H. Berger had a primary responsibility to protect the base(s) from attack...almost everything else was advising the Afghans 'in the lead' and supporting them.

Overall, even though we were in a war zone, it just seemed like any imposition on a 'carefree' way of life to this new generation of Marines...you would find yourself being put under investigation, counseled, and your career ruined (if not 'setback').

* * * * *

"I saw them outside the wire and what they were 'up to' and I reported it...but nobody did anything."

That was a comment from a fellow U.S. Marine that was serving in Afghanistan aboard Camp Leatherneck at the same time as me during my deployment there...only thing is...his comments were made in a PTSD Veterans Administration Group therapy session in the later part of 2019...just under three years after I retired.

"Sir, we caught some local Afghans coming in under the wire on the Camp Bastion (UK) side of the base last night," said U.S. Marine Colonel Jeffrey Tuggle in the early days of September 2012.

This was said during a morning standup meeting with Major General Gurganus...and you must know this information was also shared with the head of all ground forces, (then) Major General David H. Berger, who received the daily intelligence reports.

Gurganus asked Tuggle, "What does that mean?"

Tuggle's response, "Sir, they're just scavengers trying to get to our trash dump."

Then, it was like a 'good-ol-boy' network of locked eyes took place, and the event was displaced and/or disregarded.

But what was really going on was that the Taliban had been using the locals that had 'struck-up' residencies near the base...mostly for the sanitation flow off the base that provided water and fertilizer for growing agriculture...to hide behind and launch reconnaissance on our base for an attack that would take place beginning in the evening

hours of Sept. 14, 2012, and continue into the overnight of the 15th.[169]

There would be a U.S. Marine Sergeant and Lieutenant Colonel killed during the attack...along with an entire squadron of Harrier aircraft destroyed (this is the kind of fixed wing aircraft that can take off and land vertically...and the Marine Corps didn't have very many of them). The Lieutenant Colonel was the squadron commander.

I'd just like to make three comments at this point:

1) Overall, I view the success of the 'Bastion attack' in September of 2012 upon our base as the result of the firing of U.S. General David McKiernan as the head of all operations in Afghanistan for not 'being a good host' to battlefield tourists and his Afghan 'neighbors' for the success of this attack. After McKiernan was fired, there was no General Officer with 'balls' to 'make waves' in doing what needed to be done.
    a. After the attack on our base, the first thing the next commanding general of the base did was bulldoze the surrounding area around the base...and yes, that impacted the local residences and the governor of the province complained.
2) While I personally had come to hate Gurganus...I was still his Public Affairs Officer, and I didn't really work for him...I worked for the Marine Corps. So, as long as I was working for him, I felt it was my duty not to let him fail or let the command/USMC fail. But once I no longer would work for him...that would be a different story. I know that may not make much sense...but that's how I rationalized things...he could have sent me home after I requested it...but they kept me around just in case something like this happened because they knew I could handle it...after

[169] This will be referred to as the 'Bastion Attack' of 2012.

all, handling a crisis had become my 'calling card' among my peers.

3) During the attack, the base locked down all U.S. Marine personnel that were in their barracks...why would you 'lockdown' U.S. Marines that are all basic 'riflemen/riflewomen' during an attack on a base?

* * * * *

In December of 2021, the U.S. Marine Corps 'banned' Amphibious Assault Vehicles (aka AAVs) from waterborne training...meaning, the vehicles were 'banned' because there was a high percentage that the vehicle could sink with all its personnel aboard.

Why is this important?

Well, because the United States Marine Corps was founded as a subordinate command/organization to the U.S. Navy as the ground forces that went from 'ship to shore' ...to be 'expeditionary' so-to-speak.

There is a 'Secretary' of the Army at the Pentagon...a Secretary of the Air Force...and a Secretary of the Navy. There is no 'Secretary' of the Marine Corps; it falls under the Secretary of the Navy.

Now, in 2021, the Amphibious Assault Vehicle's capability was nonexistent until its replacement vehicle could be manufactured.[170]

So, why is the Marine Corps still around if it has lost the ability to carry out the primary mission of its creation?

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[170] Listen, I could go into the corrupt contracting process of the Pentagon and the Department of Defense, but it would just be your normal/'run-of-the-mil' type of bribery and promises of high paying jobs after retirement with Defense contractors...but the failure of the Marine Corps to maintain and continue its ship to shore capability over two decades of trying...it was a negative 'strike' against all of the Marine Corps leaders involved in the contracting and Testing-Evaluation process.

Why does America have a Marine Corps if it is no longer 'expeditionary'?

Well, would you believe they did a study in 1957 that was led by (then) U.S. Marine Brigadier General Victor Krulak that asked the question of "Why does America have a Marine Corps?"

Krulak wrote to (then) Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Randolph Pate the following upon completing his study:

"The United States does not need a Marine Corps. However, for good reasons which completely transcend cold logic, the United States wants a Marine Corps." (Reference #50)

You see, the Marine Corps provides nothing really to the defense department that the other military services cannot...but I will say that what the Marines can do on land is to be a 'self-sufficient' force unto our own without the assistance of another military service (for the most part).

* * * * *

My head came off the desk in the Command Operations Center at Camp Leatherneck about 1 or 2 am in the morning; like the long and slow yoga exercise of raising your head up from your chin, I slowly began to regain my consciousness.

I looked around to see if anyone had noticed me collapsing on the desk and a thought projected itself into my head like a bullet shot out of a gun... "E-mail Kortney Cube of NBC back before she suspects we got our asses kicked tonight by the Taliban."

Kortney had been on the story just hours after word of the attack on our base had spread amongst the media. She began via emails from the Pentagon. I wanted to continue to give her the 'warm fuzzy' like Han Solo when he rescued Princes Leia in the first Star Wars movie.

"...everything's perfectly all right now. We're fine. We're all fine here, now, thank you. How are you?" -- Han Solo in Star Wars Episode IV, A New Hope

Before I suffered a mild heart attack and collapsed, I had just been informed that we had lost eight additional Marines in a Cryogenics lab that the Taliban blew up during the attack.

Prior to me being informed of that tragic news, I felt as an experienced Public Affairs Officer (of nearly two decades) that I could handle the loss of a Squadron Commander and Sergeant of Marines...and I could delay the public release of an entire squadron of Marine Harrier aircraft being destroyed...I 'delayed' the aircraft destruction to deny the Taliban their strategic (communications) victory they sought. But loosing eight more Marines...there was no way I could've delayed the release of that information and slapped 'lipstick on this pig' so-to-speak.[171]

But not long after I reawakened and responded to NBC, I was informed the eight Marines were found alive.

Major General Gurganus had gone to bed prior to midnight or shortly after if my memory serves me correctly...which I found unusual for a Marine general (during an attack) to do this in contrast to my numerous previous combat deployments and exercises. Additionally, Master Sergeant

[171] There is a document...or a code...it is referred to as the 'Principles of Information' that constitutes the underlying public affairs philosophy for the Department of Defense. It states that information can be withheld from the public for 'national security' reasons...and I felt the initial withholding from public release of the loss of the squadron was for 'national security' reasons to limit the impact of all this information 'dropping' at once upon the American and International media. It was not, and I repeat, not, to ultimately withhold the information on the squadron's destruction from the public...it was simply to delay it and deny the Taliban the PR victory they sought with the attack.

XXX for some reason, was unable to come into the Command Operations Center that night.

Major General Berger was placed in charge because he oversaw all the ground forces for the entire Regional Command Southwest...it was not our deputy Commanding General, a UK general officer.

I would stay awake until about 8 am before I went to get some sleep.

Upon waking, I was informed the Taliban had released a propaganda video of their training for the attack and footage of smoke billowing from the interior of the base...Gurganus, who now starting using his 'big head' and focusing rather than his 'little head' noticed that the propaganda video was not of the actual attack as claimed and was of old footage of a controlled burn pit 'burn off' aboard base.

So, I began a 'Public Relations' counterattack on the video's credibility and the Taliban's claims of damage to our Marine V-22 aviation assets ...at the same time, I worked the official release authorization for an entire Marine squadron of Harrier aircraft destroyed by the Taliban up to U.S. Marine General John R. Allen, who had taken command of ISAF and all U.S. Forces in Afghanistan.

I would also begin making calls and doing interviews about the heroic actions of the Marines during the attack.

It would be a week before the media would learn of the full impact the Taliban attack had on our aviation assets and come to label it as the worst aviation loss for the Marine Corps since Vietnam.

It is true to say that I withheld the release of information regarding the loss of an entire squadron of aircraft from the media and public for national security reasons ...but I would be lying if I wasn't also thinking about the impact of this major security 'fuck up' on the reputation and future of the Marine Corps if it was all reported at once.

I would also deny CBS 60 MINUTES from visiting the base to do a report on the attack because I knew if they arrived, they would not only embarrass the U.S. Marine Corps as they had done numerous times in the past ...but their reporter, Laura Logan, would almost certainly have 'picked up on' the relationship between Major General Gurganus and Master Sgt. XXX.[172]

* * * * *

I-W-T-K-M

"A little religious communications ...might not be a bad idea at this stage of the game ...Now myself, I don't take any chances. I talk to Mohammed, Buddha, Mr. Jesus H. Christ, and any other religious honchos I can come up with ...there is no such thing as an atheist in a combat situation." -- *The Siege of Firebase Gloria (1988)*

I'm standing in a disgusting porta potty, it's over 100 degrees outside, and I can't pee...I can't pee, I can't pee, I can't pee!

'IWTKM' ...that's the acronym I would write in my notebook almost every day after a certain point in the deployment...it stood for, 'I Want To Kill Myself'.

So, one day, while standing in the porta potty, unable to pee and overwhelmed with the same thoughts repeating over and over again in my head with my frustrations and resentments for the way I was being treated and the prison I felt I was being held in...I left the porta potty headed directly for my living quarters to kill myself with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the side of my temple.

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[172] Regarding 60 MINUTES embarrassing the Marine Corps, here are a few examples: A FEW GOOD WHITE MEN in 1993 and the MV-22 Osprey failing 'mission capable' rate in 2001 (Top Marines In Osprey Cover-Up?) just to name a few.

But as I walked in, sat on the side of my bed, and drew my 9mm pistol, a calendar my wife had made for me with my kids on it caught the side of my right eye and I just stopped and stared at it...it was right then and there I told myself I wasn't going to kill myself and I would pay each and every one of these mother fuckers back for what they thought they could do to me (and get away with).

I honestly think Major General Gurganus and Master Sgt. XXX would have taken great joy in my suicide.

Next, I consulted with the base legal officer to press charges against any junior officers or enlisted Marines that thought they could be disrespectful to me...because Major General Gurganus talked so much 'shit' about me, it reverberated throughout the staff.

I also started sending profane laced emails to senior staff members..just 'keeping it real' ...because I didn't give a fuck anymore.

I mean, if I was ready to kill myself, what did I have to lose? ...but I also knew, just like in Marine Corps Boot Camp San Diego, at a certain point, that if I 'went along to get along', I would get out of there faster than resisting and getting into a legal dilemma that would keep me from freedom longer.

I had been broken so-to-speak regarding the stress they had put me under during the deployment and how it physically resulted in a heart attack and mentally with a suicide attempt/plan...but there's no way in hell I was going to let them know that unless I was ready to share it.

So, I continued to set up interviews with Major General Gurganus to make him look good and when the staff tried to write me up for disrespect, especially for the way I talked to the UK Strategic Communications Colonel...the Chief of Staff denied them.

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End of tour Medals...

Major Generals Gurganus and Berger received glamorous 'end of deployment' medals...and Gurganus was nominated for a 3rd star.

I was ordered by the Chief of Staff to submit a 'Bronze Star' medal recommendation for Master Sergeant XXX...and while she may have only left Camp Leatherneck twice during her year deployment, she received it.

Hell, even a Senior Enlisted Sailor that only deployed for a month on the base was awarded a Bronze Star.

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My (then) wife was sobbing on the phone...she couldn't catch her breath.

One of our family's dogs had died of a sudden heart attack...I only had a week left in the deployment and I thought I might have to ask to leave early because of how much this impacted my family...but she pulled it together.

* * * * *

There were no media to greet us upon arrival back to Camp Pendleton...which struck me as odd because every other unit returning from a combat deployment was greeted by a large crowd and media.

We arrived under the cover of darkness...like, because of the Bastion attack embarrassment, we didn't deserve the same kind of welcoming other units received?

I was able to text my wife before she drove down to pick me up with the kids...I wanted her to fill a thermos full of gin that I could start drinking once I got in the car.

That night was the one and only night I've ever ripped the clothes off a woman in the process of having sex.

"If you want blood...you got it" – AC/DC

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"Finished with my woman 'cause she couldn't help me with my mind...People think I'm insane because I am frowning all the time"

Black Sabbath – Paranoid

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"Why aren't you listening to me...get out"

Puddle of Mudd – Control (music video)

Not Going To The Daily Intel

When you return from deployment you get two weeks of leave/vacation.

I spent most of my time during the day as my wife worked and the kids were in school just sitting on the beach staring out at the waves, the water, and the sand.

While I was supposed to be 'taking a break', my work phone would continuously ring, and I would get email taskings from Major General Charles M. Gurganus' aides asking me to start work for a trip to DC he was taking for media engagements...a trip he was taking Master Sergeant XXX with him on.

I didn't respond to one email, nor did I answer the phone once...instead, I called in a favor to have a friend contact the I MEF (1st Marine Expeditionary Force) Chief of Staff and have me removed from Gurganus' command and immediately start my new job as the director of Public Affairs for I MEF.[173]

Now, I was no longer Gurganus' Public Affairs Officer and I submitted an Inspector General complaint to the Pentagon on him and his 'fraternizing' relationship with Master Sergeant XXX because it was 'out in the open' and impacted 'good order and discipline' ...my (then wife) also signed the complaint because of what she knew from the

[173] Like the two dominate political parties in America, there are 'Loyalty Groups' in the military. These 'groups' are led by a senior officer and made up of junior officers and enlisted personnel that like the working environment, believe in their leader, and most of all, want to ride their leader's coattails regarding promotions. There was a rumor that during a turnover from one Commandant of Marines to the next during the Clinton administration; the two 'Loyalty Groups' were at such odds that there was no turnover, and when the incoming team arrived at their office spaces...there were only desks and chairs in the office. A good example is in the movie 'Patton' when the general tells his staff that he understands if they want to 'jump ship' after he got in trouble for slapping the Soldier that had battle fatigue.

'wives' aboard Camp Pendleton about an apparent 'open marriage'.

While I was concerned as to if the Inspector General complaint would be followed up on and investigated...one thing I did know is that the Secretary of Defense is personally informed of every Inspector General complaint received on a general officer.

* * * * *

I came back from a morning jog in late April of 2013, about a month after we had returned from deployment and took a seat on the inclined cement driveway of my residence aboard Camp Pendleton and started checking the morning media clips...and there it was.

HEADLINE: "Taliban attack exploited security cutbacks" (Reference #51)

It was an article from the Washington Post written by veteran reporter Rajiv Chandrasekaran that questioned the security decisions made by U.S. and British Commanders leading up to the Bastion Attack in September of 2012.

There would be numerous articles written by other reporters in the coming days that basically echoed what Rajiv had reported via senior U.S. officials with knowledge of the base and security lapses...but who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

One month later, Rajiv would break news about the Bastion attack again by reporting (Reference #52) on the 'launching' of an investigation into the Bastion attack by U.S. Central Command (the British would also launch their own investigation as well).

So, about eight months from the date of the Bastion Attack...they finally decide to launch an investigation.

Then, a little over 3 months later, GQ would publish a 'feature article' on the attack, written by Matthieu Aikins,

with the headline, “Enemy Inside the Wire: The Untold Story of the Battle of Bastion.” (Reference #53)

The GQ article described the security lapses as ‘startling’ and the circulation of the article in the Washington D.C. ‘beltway’ brought additional calls for accountability…and due to the comic book style graphics depicting the attack that accompanied the GQ article, young Marines had been attracted to the article as well.

Aikins is one of the best reporters in Afghanistan because he speaks all the languages and he easily blends in with the local communities…not just in Afghanistan, but he can easily ‘transit’ Pakistan as well. For example, I never had to worry about where Aikens would sleep for the night while in my ‘Area of Operations’ like I did for the TIME Magazine reporter.

So, while Rajiv’s reporting provided comments from U.S. Officials, Aikin’s reporting provided the local Afghans’ point of view that lived and worked around the base…as well as the Taliban’s.

Twenty-seven days later, the results of the U.S. Central Command investigation would be completed and Gurganus would be ‘fired’ (aka ‘forced into retirement’) from the U.S. Marine Corps…his third star denied. (Reference #54)

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“It really doesn’t matter.”

That’s what a doctor would tell me in early 2018 (two years into retirement) regarding my question as to if, during the Bastion attack in September of 2012, when I collapsed on the table in the Command Operations Center…if I had suffered a heart attack or a stroke that left me with a permanent condition referred to as ‘Left-Bundle-Branch-Block’.

Apparently, instead of blood flow going from the right side of my heart to the left via a ‘ventricle’, the blood gets pushed from the right side into the left because the

ventricle is 'kinked' so-to-speak', like a garden hose kink...this can cause my body to shake and give me the feeling that I'm about to pass out (or I pass out).

Initially, I had gone to see the base doctor aboard Camp Leatherneck about two days after the attack complaining about a cold I couldn't 'shake' and when he listened to my heart, he ordered an EKG.

The EKG at Camp Leatherneck, while showing the existence of this heart condition, was not identified. The heart condition 'Left-Bundle-Branch-Block' is hard to notice on an EKG unless you know what you are looking for...and so more heart tests were ordered upon my return to Camp Pendleton in April of 2013.

When I showed up for the 'stress tests' I was still taking the pain drug Tramadol that increases your heart rate and I believe skewed the test results.

So, while the EKGs documented when I developed this condition, it would not be properly identified until the middle of 2017.

I will admit, I was in denial that I had any problems with my heart...but my fatigue from the heart attack had me parking in a dark space in the corner of the Camp Pendleton Hospital parking garage during my lunch breaks to nap daily.

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Hanging out in the office late one day, I received a phone call informing me of two helicopters that collided at a training base under our command and that I would be handling all media queries.

Now, normally, when I would get a call about an event that could garner national media coverage, I would have a rush of adrenalin...but this time, along with the adrenalin rush, my body shook, and I felt like I was about to pass out.

To this day, if I experience stress, my body will still shake and I will feel like I'm about to pass out; the exact

symptoms of my heart condition, 'Left-Bundle-Branch-Block'. I also started to realize that several of my T-shirts had holes being torn out of them in the chest area where my heart is...and while I'm now aware of this 'unconscious tick', it continues to this day, no matter the stress level.

The best way I can explain this to you would be the actor Tom Hanks in the movie 'Saving Private Ryan' when, near the end of the movie, he is seen with his right hand shaking uncontrollably...for me, it was not just my left hand, but the entire left side of my upper body.

Instead of following up with a medical doctor, I sought mental health treatment because at the time my heart condition was undiagnosed, and I thought the shaking was due to psychological issues from the last deployment with Major General Gurganus.

I first sought treatment with a civilian psychologist, off base, to try and hide the mental health struggles I was having.

Red spots had also broken out all over my face in a rash and I would have the hiccups every day...beginning as I drove into work.

After the six visits allowed by my military TRICARE health insurance were used up, I either had to discontinue psychological care or see a psychologist aboard Camp Pendleton...which I did.

Lastly, I did confide in my chiropractor upon my return from deployment...because he was outside of the military healthcare system. I told him, "I think I'm depressed...that was a bad deployment."

He never charged me for a visit again.[174]

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[174] While not charging me for my visits was an incredible gesture...after a while, I just felt like they were taking pity on me, and I stopped going.

“I think it moved.”

That’s what the character George Costanza said to his friend Jerry in episode one of season three for the Seinfeld sitcom…he was referring to his penis while he was getting a message from another man.

Why am I writing about this?

Well, due to my heart condition I had developed, I would lose my erection spontaneously during sex.

The worst part wasn’t for me in my opinion as the look in my wife’s eyes seemed to make me think she thought it was her fault.

So, I went to a couple of doctors that stuck their finger up my ass and Wala…I had a prescription for Viagra.

The first time we tried out Viagra it worked great…but I guess it lasts for about four hours regarding effectiveness and use.

It was within that four-hour timeframe that my wife and I decided to take the kids to the nearby Oceanside mall after they got out of school.

The entrance to the mall that we walked into had about a block of Victoria Secret models wearing lingerie…and I had to tell my wife, “Uh, I think it moved…I’m going to go sit down for a while.”

* * * * *

In late 2013 I arrived at my psychologist’s office at Camp Pendleton for my weekly session.

The psychologist started off by asking me how I was doing and what I was up to?

I responded by telling her I had been ‘mulling over’ and debating the difference in my mind between something that happens to you in this life as a matter of ‘fate’ or ‘free will’.

Meaning, I was asking questions to myself regarding significant life events, like 9-11 ...there was a lot of talk amongst those that survived that day regarding if they had turned 'left' instead of 'right' they wouldn't be alive today.

FATE: Does everything happen because God (or someone/something) controls everything, and we have no control?

FREE WILL: Do we have the ability with our thoughts and/or actions to either stay away from or bring into our life certain experiences?

The psychologist, Dr. Rebecca A. McKnight, then promptly closed her notebook, stood up, opened her door, and asked me to leave. As I backed out of her office, surprised, but not objecting, McKnight said to me, "There are others in greater need of care," as she shut the door in my face.

On the one hand, I took her actions to mean I might not have a mental health problem (i.e., I'm not crazy) ...and that gave me some hope in a strange way.[175]

I wanted to believe I didn't need mental health help...I wanted to be strong; but to be honest, I really didn't want to keep seeing a psychologist.

I just wanted to get prescription meds from the Psychiatrist I had begun seeing at Camp Pendleton so I could hide deep-down inside and away from the Marine Corps.

On the other hand, I feared Dr. McKnight's actions might infer that she thought I was some fraud just trying to get a disability rating for PTSD.

It was hard for me to trust a psychiatrist for years until I left the military 'system' for mental health care (and that includes the VA) ...primarily because I had no medical

[175] For the record, in my first few years of retirement and during deep meditation...I found my own answer (or rationalization) to the question of Fate vs. Free Will.

explanation for my physical symptoms (i.e., my body shaking and feeling like I was going to pass out).

Lastly, I never told the military psychologist or psychiatrist about my attempted suicide out of fear of repercussions...it was bad enough that the commanding general of my command had requested a list of all his officers and senior non-commissioned officers receiving psychological medications.

* * * * *

"I can sneak you in the side door...if you want?"

That was a question asked of me by Camp Pendleton psychiatrist Dr. Jennifer Hailey.

"No, I'll be fine in the waiting room," I responded.

The 'waiting room' of the Camp Pendleton mental health building would usually be populated by junior male and female Marines.

The females appeared to be traumatized and the male Marines were heavily medicated and sleeping with their hands holding up their chins, elbows on their knees, while seated.

As I drove up to the mental health offices at the time, they were located off to the side and away from the base's Naval hospital in a dirt parking lot and operating out of mobile homes with cameras located in all corners of the waiting room and hallways.

I once asked Dr. Hailey, "Why all the cameras?" ... and she told me it was because Marines were, "losing their shit," and becoming violent at times when seeking and receiving mental health care.

By the way, when you show up at a psychiatrist's office complaining that you feel your body shaking and that you are about to pass out...and then asking for drugs, the doctor then asks you what symptoms you are looking for to reduce (or diminish, go away, etc.).

I told Dr. Haley I wanted a daily drug for my anxiety and then, since I had heard about some multifunctional drugs, add 'pain management' to it as well for my back and neck; then I wanted another drug, a 'rescue' drug, like a 'Valium'.

I was given the drug 'Cymbalta' for my anxiety and nerve pain...and as soon as I took it the first time, I immediately felt relief; but I also ended up sleeping for the next week as I started out on the drug and appeared just like the junior Marines in the mental health waiting room, resting my head on my hands but at my dining room table in my house as my wife worked around me.

After I received my heart diagnosis in late 2017, I stopped taking this drug because it had not only stopped working for me, but it also mixed at times with my pain pills (Tramadol) that sped my heart rate up.

For the 'rescue' drug, Dr. Hailey prescribed me the drug 'Lorazepam' ...just before retirement when I called her for a 'refill', she said she would 'refill the prescription' but warned me to find a way to 'get off the drug'.

* * * * *

After the first night of my arrival back from deployment, the honeymoon period of reuniting with my wife was short lived.

I woke up the next morning and looked over at my wife in bed and she was laying on her left side with her back to me...but she seemed pale and lifeless.

So, I slid over next to her and placed my hand slowly on her right forearm...nothing.

So, then I shook her and while she was alive, she was close to being in a coma...and stayed in bed for the next three days...and off and on in bed for the next four days after that.

She had been 'hanging on' and keeping everything together until I returned and now it was her time to rest.

Before I had deployed a year prior, I had flown out to Camp Pendleton to 'check-in' and get my gear.

During my check-in process, I met with the Deputy Commanding General of the command I would be working for upon my return from deployment...and he 'highly' recommended that I, and my family, live on the base.

So, while I registered for base housing almost a year in advance...when my wife and kids arrived to Camp Pendleton about six months later, they told her she had to wait for the new housing located on the east side of the base to be completed.

For three months my wife, kids, (now only) one dog, and numerous cats, were basically homeless...the only 'up' side to this was that she was back in California where we had family all over the state.

So, they went from relative to relative for overnight visits up in northern California, the Valley (Fresno, Clovis area), and the Central Coast until the house was ready...a new house that had windows that were built not to open mind you.

While my wife had about 30 days to 'move in' and unpack prior to my arrival, she had done a great job...but while she was trying to recover from getting our house on the east coast ready to rent and driving across the United States, then being homeless for months...I had returned home a mental and physical mess.

So, what did I do, I bitched about how she set the garage up and why now the dog (who had just lost her best friend and partner in crime) was staying in the house...yup, that's right, I'm a fucking asshole.

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The Marine Corps conducts two fitness tests a year and one of them is the Combat Fitness Test (aka, CFT).

One part of the CFT is an 880-yard sprint in uniform and boots...and when I would train for this part of the 'test', I

would end up in the ER with an asthma attack to get a breathing treatment.

Another part of the CFT is when you must carry another Marine on your back, in what is referred to as a "fireman's carry" for about 100 yards.

When I would train for this part of the CFT, I would place four 50-pound bags of sand in a duffle bag and put it on my back...but I was starting to fall down when trying to carry this weight as my back would just 'give out'.

So, all of this, along with my worsening fatigue to complete a full workday, the pinched nerve in my neck was limiting my computer time, and I was still throwing up my food randomly...I realized it was over, I wasn't 'Superman', and I submitted for retirement.

My wife told me I should have consulted with her before I submitted for my retirement from the Marine Corps and I just turned away from her and walked off shaking my head because if you can't pass the fitness tests, you can't lead Marines...it was not 'up to her'.

* * * * *

Unfortunately, commanders at times will try to cover up or prevent official investigations into their leadership from higher command for incidents and accidents.

While at Camp Pendleton, there would be times where a vehicle rollover that resulted in death would not be forwarded to my office for release...or publicly released by the Public Affairs officer at that (lower) command.

So, after about a week, they would get a call from a local reporter that 'had their ear to the ground' regarding the Marines at Camp Pendleton...and the command would be asked for an official comment regarding the training incident and the loss of life.

Lastly, I came to realize after a certain time handling aviation and vehicle incidents that resulted in crashes and death...the investigators somehow/someway would

always find the incident the fault of the pilots or drivers...otherwise, the aircraft or vehicle may not continue to be operational, and if it was in testing, it may not make it out of testing.

* * * * *

I thought I could coast to the finish line of my retirement for the next year and a half...but there would be a change of command ceremony at Camp Pendleton in July of 2014 for the command that I was working for, I MEF (1st Marine Expeditionary Force).

Major General David Berger, who was loyal to Major General Charles Gurganus and the commander of all ground forces during the Bastion attack (but somehow escaped investigation for the Bastion attack of 2012) ...ended up taking Gurganus' third star and took command of I MEF.

To say that I knew I was fucked would be an understatement...I was on the wrong side of a loyalty group pissing contest among general officers.



Major General Charles Gurganus (left) shaking hands with then Lieutenant General David Berger at Gurganus' retirement ceremony in May of 2014.

While I had asked for help to get away from Gurganus' command upon return from Afghanistan...I just felt, at that time, with my rank as a Lieutenant Colonel, I was either going to win or lose on my own...and I ended up losing on my own.

* * * * *

"You got a fucking problem with me?"

I asked the Staff Secretary of I MEF after she continually harassed my Marines at the morning three-hour Operations and Intelligence briefings that I refused to attend unless the Commanding General was in attendance (that would usually be on Wednesdays).

I viewed these mandatory and daily briefings as 'overkill' vise being vigilant...so, I sent my junior officers to attend, and when they did, the Staff Secretary would ask them where I was and why I wasn't there.

It was a staff grab by the 'G3'/'Operations' & 'G2'/Intelligence sections to consume most of the entire I MEF's staff time, attention, and budget.

I also felt that I wasn't receiving information in these morning Intelligence briefings I hadn't already become aware of via open-source reporting, either via the Cable News Networks, Newspapers, and the internet.

Not long after being elected in November of 2016, President Trump was criticized for matters involving his interest in some of the daily intelligence briefings, but I felt like I understood what he was going through as he probably had excellent media 'clip-services' he received from around the world because of his businesses...what was he supposed to do when he started receiving (classified) briefings about world events that he was already aware of and told he had to waste hours every day receiving this same information?

If there was a serious need for an Operations and Intelligence briefing, like a secret raid such as killing

Osama Bin Ladin...it would be compartmentalized, not given to the entire staff.

Bottom line: I fucking hated being in long meetings...and meetings at all for that part; especially the daily and weekly ones. I also felt like the Staff Secretary was a 'bully' and the way you deal with bullies is to stand up to them.

Anyway, I continued to berate the Staff Secretary outside the I MEF headquarters for about five minutes and as she profusely apologized...she not long thereafter conspired with my deputy to file another capricious Inspector General complaint and try to have me sent off to Korea.

I found it humorous that they selected me to send off to Korea since I had more deployment time than anyone I knew at I MEF and I had just a month or so to go before retirement...but yeah, typical, and I write this satirically...let the Marine Officers of I MEF that joined the Marine Corps to go to war, stay at home and stay comfortable while someone who is retiring and already completed numerous combat deployments is sent to Korea for a month.

I got out of the Korea deployment via my medical doctor and a psychiatrist recommendation...so, as retribution, they relieved the medical doctor the next day from his post...likely ruining his career...all because they couldn't send my ass to Korea as part of some vendetta.

* * * * *

I not only didn't show up to morning Intel meetings, at times I wasn't able to attend the weekly Chief of Staff's meetings...instead, sending one of my junior Marines.

One time, I sent one of my 'Mustang'[176] Marines to the Chief of Staff's weekly meeting and since he was a 2nd Lieutenant, the Chief of Staff thought he could joke with him...but it backfired tremendously, with the Chief of Staff

[176] Remember, a 'Mustang' Marine is one that has gone through both U.S. Marine Corps bootcamps, both Enlisted and Officer.

getting embarrassed, because Mustangs, for the most part, have a very quick and wicked 'wit'.

My Lieutenant would end up getting counseled in the Chief of Staff's office afterward and I would be told to have my Marines get closer haircuts...even though they were within regulations.

I talked to the Marines and told them what the Chief of Staff asked but that they weren't required to get haircuts beyond the required regulations...it was up to them.

They all took it to heart and got closer haircuts...and I might have made a power point slide and put it up in the office that made fun of the haircut request (and I believe it was shared with the Chief of Staff by my female deputy who had a very familiar relationship with him from a past duty station).

Then, around Christmas time, I was the only Officer not to show up to Lieutenant General Berger's residence on base for a holiday gathering ...apparently, my name tag was the only one left on the table after the event.

Next, while I was on two types of psychiatric medication and two types of pain medications...I decided to have two beers before an 'Officers Call' where I was to introduce new personnel that had just arrived at the Camp Pendleton Public Affairs.

As I may have mentioned before, the other staff sections, like 'operations' and 'intelligence', and the Marines that work in them...they look down on Public Affairs Officers as being less of a 'warfighter' then them. You could just see it in their demeanor and side comments while the introductions were going on.

So, I told the four officers I was introducing that I was going to do some comedy and just 'roll along with it' ...and then I proceeded to introduce them as Olympic Athletes (that medaled) and Rhode Scholars, etc., with some even more outlandish accomplishments.

While my fellow officers eventually picked up on the comedy routine and told me I was, and I quote, "A funny fucker" ...the Chief of Staff didn't think it was funny and I was called into his office not long thereafter and told I had 24 hours to start working over at the administrative headquarters command until my retirement date.[177]

* * * * *

She was waiting for me outside as I pulled up to our residence aboard Camp Pendleton.

My wife was pissed and unloaded with an ass chewing.

Why? Well, I might have stopped off at a Raiders game on my way back from visiting my Mother in Sacramento.

I might have asked to take a selfie with a Raiderette cheerleader...but when she told me that they don't do selfies, she asked one cheerleader to take the photo and for the other cheerleaders to come over and put their arms around me.

Then, I might have posted it to social media.



[177] Funny thing is...I ended up working out of the Office of the Inspector General before I retired. So, all the investigations on me and they end up placing me in a job where I handled an investigation and served as a judge.

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Like I have stated previously in this chapter...the honeymoon after my return from deployment regarding my marriage was short lived.

I can remember my wife being on her knees as I tried to sleep on our couch downstairs begging me to talk to her about what I was going through...and as much as I trusted her...her and the spouses of our cul-de-sac aboard Camp Pendleton liked to talk.

'Beltway', the cat I rescued on the 495 Interstate would come into my closet space not long after I returned from deployment and proceed to take a shit inside one of my shoes.

Then, one night, after my redheaded Irish wife had some liquor in her, she came after me pissed off...and so, it was time to move out.[178]

I also realized I had fallen very low on my wife's depth chart of priorities...which I will rank as such:

1. Kids
2. Dogs
3. Wine
4. Volvo
5. House
6. Me?

* * * * *

[178] I might have made some comments about not wanting to eat her cooking on Thanksgiving as well. Her reaction was like the scene in 'Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy' when actress Christina Applegate, playing Veronica Corningstone, tells Will Ferrell, playing Ron Burgundy that he has 'bad hair'. My wife was actually a great cook; but I guess at that point in the marriage we knew how to 'push' each other's 'buttons'...so-to-speak.

At the time I moved out to an apartment in Oceanside, I had been gone over half of my 9-year marriage, gone over half my son's life, and over half of my daughters' life.

One memory sticks with me to this day is of my son while we were waiting for my wife during an appointment at the Bethesda medical hospital while living in Maryland.

He was a young kid with energy and so I let him wander around the wide open spaces of the waiting area...at one point, there was another man looking at the paintings on the wall that my son was looking at...my son reached for his hand; like this other man was his dad...and I realized, my son didn't really know who his dad was...because I'd been gone for most of his life.

* * * * *

On the 2nd of June, 1995, U.S. Air Force Pilot Scott Francis O'Grady was shot down over Bosnia and would survive, while hunted by enemy forces for the next six days.

He would make contact via a communication device he maintained on his person and a rescue mission would be tasked to a U.S. Marine Corps helicopter squadron...but this time, the 'last to know, first to go' (i.e., Public Affairs Officers, Combat Correspondent, and/or Combat Camera persons) were not aboard.

While the mission was a success to rescue our personnel from behind enemy lines...there was no documentation of the great success the U.S. Marine Corps had just completed.

This was a 'black eye' so-to-speak' for the Marine Corps Public Affairs that while we knew about the tasking at the time in the higher ranks, we didn't insist on putting a Public Affairs camera/video person aboard the rescue mission.

So, in mid 2014, when the Marines were sent back into Iraq, I sent a 'fire team' (that's about four personnel) along with them just in case something happened.

But just after they removed me from my 'directorship' of the I MEF Public Affairs office...they launched a supply investigation and didn't ask me for any help or assistance.

When I worked in 'admin' as an enlisted Marine and we lost someone's official record (and this is before electronic records and the internet) ...we would focus on finding the record book for as long as it took...and we didn't try to launch an official investigation and 'burn' someone's career in the process.

Lieutenant General David Berger, the Commanding General, would end up giving me a non-judicial punishment for the time it took to do a supply inventory...he also burned one of the best Captains that ever worked for me that oversaw the Supply account.

I asked to take full responsibility for the supply investigation and have my Captain's non-judicial punishment tore up, but Berger denied that request.

The command's lawyer, a non-deployed-to-combat Major, made sure to threaten me before I left Berger's office... "Your name will go down on the 'Official Officer misconduct list at Headquarters Marine Corps' and if you decide to respond to this non-judicial punishment, and it is deemed disrespectful to Berger, you will be charged."

I thought about it for a couple of days and then I submitted a 'vanilla' response...I told them, "the four computers that you couldn't find are in Iraq and the two cameras were so old they were sent to Marine Corps System Command in Quantico for government auction." ...all they had to do was ask me (or the Captain) where the gear was.

I just thought to myself, "Of all the fucking things I could have gotten a non-judicial punishment for or a court martial, etc. ...you get me for this?"

I would have been happy to stand up to something I was guilty of, but this...these charges...they were bullshit and obvious retaliation for Lieutenant General Berger's mentor, Major General Gurganus, because everyone

blamed me for the negative press on the Bastion Attack and the launching of the U.S. Central Command investigation.

* * * * *

Due to 'mutual' feelings between me and Lieutenant General Berger, the Commanding General, along with his Chief of Staff...and the fact that I was separated from my wife...I drove off Camp Pendleton on my retirement date without a ceremony after 22 ½ years, two U.S. Marine Corps bootcamps, 3 combat deployments to Afghanistan, 1 combat deployment to Iraq, 8 months in Haiti, and 3 years in Japan, etc., ...fuck it.

"Somebody stole my Car radio..."

'Car Radio' by Twenty One Pilots

* * * * *

"All I wanted was a Pepsi..."

'Institutionalized' by Suicidal Tendencies

Transitioning

I not only drove off the base at Camp Pendleton, California, without a retirement ceremony…I kept driving all the way back to the residence I had owned in Maryland because the previous renters had left it in a state of despair.

I would spend the next two years fixing the deck, the electrical system, the garage door, installing a new tankless water heater, and repainting every room before the house would be rented out again.

Within those two years, realizing my health was continuing to fail…I would drive across the United States three more times; each time taking a different route and two of those trips would be with one of my childhood best friends Shawn.

During the summer of 2017, the most beautiful states that I drove through were West Virginia and Montana…I would also get lost in the corn fields of Indiana with no cell reception for navigation…and I loved it!

Now days, I will only drive about 20 minutes unless it is for my kids or medical/legal issues that require me to travel down to San Diego from my residence in Carlsbad, California.

* * * * *

During my first and last visit to a VA (Veterans Affairs) psychiatrist in Maryland I was asked by the psychiatrist how I could have PTSD if I never killed anyone or got 'blown up' by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) …she also prescribed me some new/different medication that I only tried one or two days.

My first experience with my VA medical doctor was good, he seemed to know my casefile and blood work…he would turn out to be an abnormality of the VA healthcare system as I would eventually encounter five doctors in five years

that were in the stages of dementia or doctors that thought they could withhold medication (like heartburn medication) if I didn't let them take my blood every three months for their own data due to the 'shots' I'd received and the experiences I'd had over my military career. I wasn't there for health care apparently, I was a 'guinea pig' for them of sorts.

The worst form of 'guinea pig' tests in my opinion was a breathing test where they pump you full of allergens until you can't take it anymore...one time, in 2018 where I was having trouble breathing, the doctor looked at my test results and told me I looked great...I said, "That's news to me, because I threw up throughout the entire test in one of your garbage cans."

Additionally, I could get a 'higher end' medication prescribed (for example, for asthma or allergies) when on active duty but not from the VA...there was no longer a focus on 'keeping you going' while on active military service, but now the focus was to just 'keeping you alive' ...while avoiding any further liability.

Most responses from the VA doctors after medical tests was to talk to me like I had the body and heart of an 18-year-old...while sending me one-line responses to test results, such as, "your heart is fine."

* * * * *

"Would Mr. Stewart Upton please report to the front desk?"

"Would a Mr. Stewart Upton report to his boarding counter?

I might have had a couple of cocktails and been sitting 'rocking out' with my iPod when I looked over at my boarding counter and saw a Maryland State law enforcement official wearing a drill instructor smokey hat...he was scanning the area for me in a boarding area of the Baltimore Washington International airport.

I removed one of my air pods to hear what was being broadcast...and sure as shit, it was, "Mr. Stewart Upton, please report to your boarding counter."

> *{OK, so this is it...I've never been arrested, but I know I've deserved it over my life, whatever it is they are going to arrest me for, I know I did it and I deserve it...they finally got me ...for whatever it is}*

The law enforcement official asked me to come with him...and while my flight was due to take off in less than an hour and I had to pick up my kids in the morning (in California) ...what choice did I have?

So, I arrived at the main area of the airport where a Department of Homeland Security agent met me...he showed me his ID and then this is what he said:

"I know you think this is funny...but it's not funny."

I pulled out a towel I had in my backpack to continually wipe off the sweat profusely rolling down my face as I thought I was headed for a jail cell.

Well, apparently, even though my wife and I were 'on again and off again' in our marriage, I had bought her a 'joke gift' for her office from the Quantico, Virginia town store that was basically a small piece of stained wood, with a hand grenade glued to one end of the plaque, and on the other end it had a small white square, no thicker than a credit card, with the number '1' written in black...the square was attached to the 'pull pin' of the hand grenade via a medal wire with a reference for the customer to "Please take the next number."

I had checked the gift into my checked baggage and apparently, they had to roll out a bomb robot to take it apart...while they contemplated evacuating the entire BWI (Baltimore/Washington International) airport.

The grenade apparently still had remnants of gun powder inside...and that's what set off their sensors.

I was freed to go with five minutes to catch my plane...I took my seat covered in sweat from the stress and running through the airport.

The stewardesses were very empathetic to me and gave me a couple free drinks to settle me down.

Years later, I would receive a letter from the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) offering me to pay a fine of a couple of hundred dollars for my violation of trying to check an old hand grenade into baggage (in the letters sent to me...it was referred to as a 'novelty hand grenade').

They also disqualified me from 'TSA PreCheck', which allows you to bypass some of the security checks on your way to boarding your plane.

I don't mind being held accountable, but this happened in 2018 and I'm still getting letters in 2022 from the TSA as if they are just now getting around to reviewing my case.

* * * * *

"What's wrong with your heart?" ...asked the anesthesiologist.

This was the second time I'd been asked that by an anesthesiologist; the first was at Camp Pendleton in 2015 right before a medical procedure.

"Nothing is wrong with my heart," I said confidently both times.

But unlike the 2015 procedure, there was no detailed follow-up; after all, tests had been ordered after I returned from my last deployment in mid-2013 and they kept me on full duty...but the reality was, they didn't order and run the type of tests needed to clearly identify that I'd had a heart attack on that deployment.

So, there I was at the McCone Endoscopy Center in Maryland, on my back, with Dr. Jonathan McCone and his anesthesiologist looking at the heart monitor, then looking

at each other and debating if they should continue with the procedure.

We agreed to proceed with the endoscopy but only under the condition that after it was completed, I would go to my military doctor and request specific tests for my heart...and if they rejected those requests, they were to give a call to Dr. McCone.

As I mentioned before, I had been taking the drug tramadol before the heart tests in 2013 and I took it before the heart tests in 2017 but the technician was able to get me calmed down enough to complete the tests at Walter Reed Medical Center.

The results came back with a heart diagnosis of 'Left Bundle Branch Block' ...and it continues to show up on my EKGs to this day.

I know I've written about my heart condition in the last couple of chapters...but this is when I found out that I'd had a heart attack and with that knowledge, I started putting the 'pieces' together that would lead me back to the night of the Bastion attack in September of 2012.

I'd been telling medical and psychological doctors for years ever since I returned from my last deployment that my body would shake at times, and I would feel like I was going to pass out...the exact symptoms of 'Left Bundle Branch Block'.

One day not long thereafter, as I sat on the side of my bed at my residence in Maryland, I found myself in a type of deep meditation in which I felt my heart and its fatigue...if that makes sense.

After that day, I stopped taking the handful of pills I had been taking every day; the Cymbalta, the Lorazepam, the Percocet, cholesterol, asthma inhaler, and limited my use of the pain/nerve pill Tramadol until I finished getting the house ready for rent and drove back out to California...I combined the end of taking Tramadol with 28 days of fasting on only fruits and vegetables.

I felt like I could possibly live another decade after those 28 days, and so I go back to that type of diet at times now when I'm not feeling good and can't breathe.

* * * * *

Doug said, "But you were 'on' something right," ... "you were 'messed up' right?"

I had seen one of my five best friends (Doug) and his wife right after I retired in early 2016 while I was still taking all the drugs previously mentioned.

They bought me dinner in a very nice restaurant in Templeton, California right before I would drive to my Maryland residence.

It would be about a year and a half later, after I had received my heart diagnosis and stopped taking the pills that I would travel back to Paso Robles, California to gather with Doug and my other childhood best friend Robert (and Shawn was traveling with me) ...we all grew up together.

While we were at a bar atop the 'Paso Robles Inn' having drinks, that's when Doug asked me if I had been 'on something'.

What I realized after that...is that inside myself, once I started taking the medications, I felt fine and normal; but outside/outwardly, others saw me differently and that was a perception of something being 'off' or 'wrong' with me.

I thought to myself, why hadn't my wife ever told me...why hadn't others?

* * * * *

"With all due respect," he said; and before he could continue...

"Hey, don't tell me that...if you're going to say something...just say it," the Judge, the Honorable Kelly C. Mok, told him in a San Diego County courtroom.

This was the scene before me at my first court appearance for my divorce and I'd never heard anyone say that before in response to a 'with all due respect' statement...I guess I wasn't in 'Kansas' anymore (so-to-speak).

Also, the law firm that my future ex-wife had hired got the court to believe there was a possibility of violence by me and so when my name was called, more Sherriff Deputies entered the courtroom.

My lawyer, because I was so nervous and sweating, told me, "Stop sweating so much," ...but there was nothing I could do about it at that time.

You see, in California, and possibly other states, the first thing they do is take 50% of your income for alimony, then another 25% for child support, then they make you pay the lawyer fees for your soon to be ex-spouse; not to mention that you've got to pay your lawyer...so overnight, you are down to less than 25% of your income.

When the Judge asked my wife if I'd ever 'hit' her...my wife waited a full 30 seconds before telling the Judge I hadn't and that's when all but one Sherriff's Officer left the courtroom.

The Judge didn't ask me if a redheaded Irish girl ever put her finger in my chest that knocked me back two steps when she was upset with me.

But truth be told, I actually had hit my wife...it was right after I'd lived three years in Japan by myself and had been doing martial arts every day. My wife and I had just started living and sleeping in the same bed together at our residence in Maryland. I don't remember my dreams for the most part, so when I wake up in the middle of the night and sit straight up in bed with a cold sweat...I don't remember or know the reason why.

One night, when I awoke from a dream and sat straight up in a cold sweat, my then wife, who is a light sleeper, put her hand on my shoulder from behind, which is a trigger in martial arts training for self-defense and I elbowed her

above her nose and in-between the eyes that knocked her head back on the pillow.

After that, I told her I wanted to sleep on the couch so it wouldn't happen again, but she said 'no', "I want you in the bed." I stopped doing martial arts training after that and it never happened again.

* * * * *

"I'm not going to let some PTSD fucked up Marine call my Mom."

Uh, that was one of my best friends; actually, my first one at age 3, Kelly, and I was asking to contact his Mom...who at one point observed me being beaten up by nearby babysitters my mother had left me with prior to beginning Kindergarten...Kelly's mom threated to end their lives if they ever touched me again.

But I had finally lost it...I was calling my small group of best friends and crying on the phone spontaneously.

Why...what finally fucking tipped me over?

Well, for one, I could no longer afford my lawyer for the divorce and so I was representing myself in court against the law firm my wife hired while being asked to pay tens of thousands of dollars in her legal fees. Financially, I was to the point of 'clipping coupons' and coasting my car to save gas.

Then, my nephew had been staying up for three days (at a time) with his mom while she and a San Diego lawyer she was staying with were doing things that law enforcement said there was nothing they could do about.[179]

[179] I might of broke some rules (so-to-speak) to end this drama. Afterward, I would voluntarily hand over the last of my psychiatric medication, Lorazepam, to my psychiatrist at Veterans Affairs who then flushed them down the toilet. You could walk through walls so-to-speak on that medication and not think anything about it.

Next, I heard Lieutenant General David H. Berger was being promoted (again) to oversee all Marines in the Asia Pacific command...and I fucking lost it.

I kept asking myself how he kept getting promoted when he was a part of allowing the Camp Bastion attack to take place?

Berger was more of a politician and ass kisser than leader of Marines...and there is no better example of that then the Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV) deaths at sea and his leadership that let that vehicle continue to operate decades after it should have been decommissioned.

But hey, why blame yourself when you can blame and fire others.

Berger went on to be placed in charge of the MCCDC (Marine Corps Combat Development Command) after his Asia Pacific tour.

The Marine Corps Combat Development Command has oversight over all current and future equipment for the Marine Corps...yet Berger escapes responsibility for not only the Bastion Attack in Sept of 2012, but for the deaths of Marines in Amphibious Assault Vehicles since being placed in charge of all operational forces at Camp Pendleton in July of 2014.

General Berger received his fourth star and became the Commandant of the Marine Corps in July of 2019.

* * * * *

Four to five ice cubes, count to three as I pour the Gin in the glass...add some orange juice or lemonade.

I lay on my bed with my feet over the edge to wiggle my hips back and forth to pull down on my spine and get some relief...crack, crack and that got my right side; then some more back and forth and I get my left side to crack, and I pass out.

I wake up on the floor somehow, someway, my back is 'out' and then I realize I need to go to the bathroom...so I crawl on my hands and knees to the toilet and pull myself up.

The towel rack across from my toilet helps pull me up and get me standing upright after my bathroom visit...and then, I'm off for the adventures of the day.

* * * * *

After I finished having my 'breakdown' in July of 2019, I returned to the Veterans Affairs mental health system and started out with group therapy and then I saw one of their psychiatrists.

During my first visit with the psychiatrist (Dr. George K. Flood), as I just mentioned in a previous entry, I turned over my remaining supply of the drug called Lorazepam because I didn't trust myself with it.

I told the psychiatrist that I no longer wanted psychiatric drugs and I wanted to move to a Veteran's Affairs Psychologist...he would end up recommended me to see a local Doctor (and a friend of his) that used an unproven type of electromagnetic (brain) therapy.

A couple of weeks after this psychiatrist's recommendation, an article in the publication 'Rewired' documented how a former Navy Seal tried this treatment and *'lost his fucking mind'* (Reference #55).

Since the VA was unable to accommodate my request for updated check-ins with someone for my mental health, I was able to take advantage of a new 'Community Care' program that outsourced me to a local private psychologist.

After about six months, and because of the way I was treated by Veterans Affairs mental health since retirement, I chose to move outside of their system and

any monitoring of my mental health...and started paying that same private psychologist out of my own pocket.[180]

* * * * *

"When is enough...enough?"

That was my Dad asking me a question during one of my last visits with him before dementia and Alzheimer's disease took over his life.

What he was trying to tell me on behalf of my Mother and himself was that they thought I was trying to continue to achieve things...just to make them proud.

He made it clear that I didn't need to 'do' or accomplish any more in my life to make them proud of me.[181]

But I told him, while I didn't want to become a pilot or take over the Gas Station he had owned...what I was 'up to' in my life was just 'inside of me'.

Years later, during my mental health breakdown, I would pick up four dozen roses (2 white, 1 red, and 1 pink) and drive to my parents' gravesite.

I laid the flowers down all around my mother's grave and I placed a package of all my rank, medals, and ribbons upon my father's grave with the following note:

"You once asked me when enough is enough. Well, I think I've had enough of these folks."

I'm no longer a U.S. Marine, I'm a former U.S. Marine."

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[180] It was not uncommon for a visit to the Veterans Affairs Medical Clinics and telling them about a problem for them to slightly smile at you...because they think you are there just to get a higher disability rating. This just made me feel like they didn't believe me...I guess I was a joke to them.

[181] As Alzheimer's and dementia was taking over my father, he began wearing a red and gold USMC windbreaker every day.


VIERRA
MARY L.
MAY 9 1903
APR 3 1962
LARRY LEE UPTON
SEPT 15 1957
NOV 16 2001
SHIRLEY LOUISE
UPTON

“May we all get to grow up in our red, white and blue little town”

Florida Georgia Line (featuring Tim McGraw)

Conclusion(s)

After I was relieved of being the Public Affairs Officer for the main operational command at Camp Pendleton, California just months before my retirement date...I was initially sent to the command's 'Headquarters Support' administrative unit.

The Commander was Colonel James H. Herrera, and he gave me an assignment...it was to provide a study of the communication flow within his command.

This would turn out to be one of the most important studies I had ever approached or was assigned in my military service.

What I found is that the Commanding Officer and their weekly staff meetings were the primary means of communication flow within a command...it had a 'ripple effect' throughout the entire command.

BOTTOM LINE: It's not the responsibility of Public Affairs personnel to ensure communication flow within a command...it's the Commanding Officer!

* * * * * *

The reputation of U.S. Marine Corps Public Affairs when I became an officer in 1997 was the best of the military services.

After three months of Public Affairs training, I was sent to my first duty station...the Consolidated Public Affairs Office (CPAO) at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, NC.[182]

When I say 'Consolidated', it means that all the Public Affairs Marines on base, regardless of the command they were given orders to be assigned to...would work out of one office on the base.

[182] I apologize if some of this is repetitive from previous entries.

For example, I was given orders to be assigned to the 2nd Marine Division but was then quickly 'loaned' to work out of the base command and then assigned to the CPAO.[183]

There was one senior Public Affairs Officer, the Director, a Deputy, and a Senior Enlisted...sections were broken down into a 'Newspaper' section, Media Section (to take and respond to media queries), a Community Relations section, and an Operational Section (to deploy Public Affairs personnel).

While the Director has his evaluations written by the base commander...he was still responsible to support the 'Operational Commands' like the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force, 2nd Marine Division, etc.

After I arrived, I started out in the Community Relations section, then I started getting my Newspaper experience when I was in Haiti...and when I returned to Camp Lejeune, I headed up the Media section. When I moved across the street to the nearby Marine Corps Air Station New River, I learned Operations.

So, as you can see, there is a process to move the Officers around to each section to gain the full complement of Public Affairs duties...and that is why, in my opinion, the Marines produced a higher quality of Public Affairs personnel because they had mentors in their offices to guide them via the questions they had or after mistakes they made.

Some years later, after years of Generals complaining they didn't have their own Public Affairs personnel...the Consolidated Public Affairs offices were De-Consolidated.[184]

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[183] Now, if war were to break out and the 2nd Marine Division were to deploy...I would be transferred back and deploy with them.

[184] There were no issues with the consolidated Public Affairs office handling crisis events for the commands...but when there were problems and bitching by the Generals would be when they called for

Now, what this resulted in was newly minted Public Affairs Officers, after three months of training, being sent out to subordinate commands (by themselves) and given extra duties that had nothing to do with Public Affairs...and mistakes were made due to a lack of mentoring and oversight by experienced Public Affairs personnel.

Around 2013, Headquarters Marine Corps Public Affairs got the Commandant of the Marine Corps to approve a Re-Consolidation of the Public Affairs field.

But, when it was attempted to be enforced, the senior commanders complained to the senior general on base...and it was undercut to the point where there was no impact on the field to return to the old days of having all Public Affairs personnel under one roof.

For example, I use to have Lieutenant Colonels asking me to permanently assign a Combat Correspondent to their unit to publicize their unit on a regular basis so higher officials would then notice the great work they were doing...all in hopes of getting promoted to the next rank.

BOTTOM LINE: Deconsolidation killed the Marine Corps Public Affairs Officer and Combat Correspondent mentoring capability!

No General, Colonel, etc., unless he/she is the senior commander aboard a military base or a General deployed and needs their own Public Affairs Officer and Combat Correspondents...they don't need their own Public Relations firm working for them.

* * * * *

Create and Communicate

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immediate Public Affairs support, and we had nobody to send because everyone in the office was already tasked out.

When you arrive at a new office or department in the military you are supposed to provide a 'Vision' and 'Mission' statement to the personnel you oversee.

I don't put much 'stock' in these 'statements' because I felt that most of the time when I arrived everyone already knew what their job was and the overall mission from higher command.

But 'when in Rome' as they say, so, on my last tour at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base as the director of Public Affairs for the overall operational command...I had to come up with a 'Vision' statement and it was, 'Create and Communicate'.

A Public Affairs Officer and Combat Correspondents need to be creative at times on how they communicate; be it by means of a certain angle while taking a photograph, your lead into an article you are writing, how you plan to 'roll out' a positive news story or respond to a crisis.

I'm not sure I was very creative at the beginning of my career, but if first you don't succeed...keep trying and eventually your ability to create new ways of producing products that communicate your messages will come to you.

* * * * *

Psychologist/Psychiatrist vs Best Friends

At a certain point, as I've written about, I stopped seeing a psychiatrist and stopped taking the drugs...then, after a certain point, I stopped seeing a psychologist because I didn't feel they could follow (or remember) the narrative of my life.

If you are old enough to remember the 'Bob Newhart Show', it was a TV show about a psychologist and one day he came home and told his wife about what his workday was like...he would basically repeat the last words of his patients' statements.

For example, “I’m having a bad day the patient says.”

The response from the psychologist is, “Having a bad day?”

It’s basically a way to get you to talk out and elaborate on your feelings.

I also feel that writing out your ‘feelings’ is also a good way to help cope with PTSD or stress…but in the end, I wanted to talk to someone that knew my life story and remembered it.

Psychologists/Psychiatrists, have multiple ‘patients’ a day and it just didn’t seem like they remembered what I was telling them.

I’ve been fortunate enough to have a handful of friends that I’ve known for over half a century now…I call them, they call me, and they not only know the story of my life, but they can also tell me to ‘get my shit together’.

* * * * *

Cleanup on aisle 5

Spokesperson blues happens when you say one thing one day, and the next, it turns out not to happen or be true.

For example, President Joe Biden and his spokesperson told America that the U.S. pullout from Afghanistan in late 2021 would not look like the American pullout from Vietnam where local residents tried to grab at and hang onto the last helicopter to leave the country…but they were wrong as Americans watched on TV a U.S. aircraft taxiing down the runway in Kabul with a large crowd of Afghans trying to grab at the aircraft and hang on to it as it took off.

Then, the Biden Administration’s Spokesperson said for weeks leading up to the pullout of U.S. troops from Afghanistan that the Afghan Army could and would effectively defend their country…but the Afghan Army ‘cut

and ran' from the Taliban once the U.S. left and the country fell to the Taliban within days.

Lastly, after the United States finally left Afghanistan, the Biden Administration's spokesperson said that no Americans were 'stranded in Afghanistan' ...and that turned out to be wrong as well.

Just know, you can't predict the future, and things like this are going to happen. But, when it does, if you don't sit down with a reporter or issue a 'clarification' press release or hold a presser wearing your 'heart on your sleeve' ...you will be going down a road that is manipulative, unethical, unprofessional, and possibly considered government 'propaganda'.

* * * * *

Nobody has a monopoly on the truth.

As a Public Affairs Officer or spokesperson of any type, you're expected to have all the answers to not just the incident, but life in certain ways...and nobody on this earth currently has all the correct answers about this life experience.

For example...questions like:

Why did someone decide to commit suicide? Why are suicide rates higher this year?

Why are the sexual assaults higher this year?

Why are rates of domestic violence higher this year?[185]

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[185] There has been some consistent messaging from the Department of Defense and the military services on these issues over the years...For suicide going up, the message is that the military numbers are comparable to the civilian sector; suicide rates going down, the messaging is that the emphasis on prevention is working. For Domestic Violence and Sexual Assaults going up, the messaging is that servicemembers are feeling more comfortable reporting to their leadership; sexual assault going down, the messaging is that the prevention training is working.

It's up to you to navigate these 'mine fields' of questions that no matter how hard you try, your answers can be debated...which creates contrast and gives the story more coverage.

* * * * *

I used to try and count the gold records on the wall of my Aunt Katherine's house in Shell beach...my uncle Art, my mother's brother, had married her and she was the aunt of the lead singer of Journey, Steve Perry.

My mother told me to stop by her house when I was in the area to see if she needed any heavy lifting or anything else...sometimes 'Little Stevie' (as my Mother would refer to him as) would be on the phone with Aunt Katherine when I arrived. Bottom line, Mr. Perry is an outstanding citizen.

One thing that my aunt Katherine talked to me about regarding Steve is that he slept in his VW 'bug' when he was struggling and trying to accomplish something he had inside of him and believed in...so, during college, at times, I slept in my car to make it through.

Nothing worth having in this world is earned easily...so, "Don't Stop Believing" in yourself!

THE END

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Upton has deployed to Haiti, Europe, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Asia. He also spent three years of service in Japan.

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Photo by Mario Tama/ courtesy of Getty Images.
Taken at Kandahar airport, Afghanistan Jan. 7, 2002.